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By

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WOMEN OF THE BIBLE.

A SERIES OF

STORY AND CHARACTER SKETCHES

OF THE

GREAT WOMEN WHO HAVE AIDED IN
MAKING BIBLE HISTORY.

BY

PROFESSOR WILLARD DONE.



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KEYSTONE OF THE BIBLE

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PREFACE.

THE Bible is not only a valuable work from a religious point of view, full of texts and passages in support and explanation of the sublimest religious truths; it is not only filled with moral maxims, calculated to lead man into the highest planes of moral life; it is not only sprinkled with gems of poetry and philosophy, inspiring to the human soul; it is not only a history of God's dealings with the chosen people. Besides all this, it is a record of individual character. Heroes, poets, kings, prophets, statesmen, libertines, tyrants, and almost all other varieties of human character, are depicted in its pages. While in some of the particulars named above, the Bible has been studied and admired and revered by our people, it has not been very well understood in the respect last named. We have paid so much attention to the written and spoken words, or the general history of the men and women of the Bible, that we have

to a great extent lost sight of the men and women themselves. We know Paul as a religious teacher, Peter as the chief of the apostles, Moses as the law-giver, chiefly through their writings, or their influence on the history of the people at large. But very little do we know of these great men as human beings, with human hopes and aspirations, faults and excellencies, simply because in our reading of their lives this element has been neglected.

This fact seems unfortunate; for one of our most valuable means of moral and religious instruction and improvement is the example set in the private lives of public men. And if the men of the Bible have been thus neglected in our study, the women have been still more neglected. Indeed, it has come to be thought that the Bible neglects women, when in reality our own study is at fault for that neglect. And lessons as valuable, and precepts as important, may be gained from the lives of the women of the Bible as from those of the men.

It is with these facts in view that the writing of this little volume has been undertaken. Its

aim, therefore, is to present to those who are interested in the sacred record the lives of the great women of the Bible in such a way as to throw the strongest possible light on their characters. A special effort will be made to show the lessons which may be drawn from the excellencies and the defects, the successes and the failures of these women. High ideals are to be found here—women as pure and as noble as the world has ever produced. As models for our young people to pattern after, they cannot be excelled. At the same time the negative side will not be neglected. “What not to do,” will be made as prominent as it needs to be, though not so prominent as “What to do.”

In the hope that pleasure and profit will follow the reading of this little volume, it is timidly launched on the sea of public favor.

W. D.

September, 1900.



INTRODUCTION.

In recent years, woman has come to occupy a very important position in systems of philosophic and sociological thought. From her former place as a mere subordinate helper to man, she has advanced to the status of his companion and equal; in which place she has begun to look for proper recognition. And this demand for recognition extends backward, as well as forward; and past systems and productions which exert any great influence on the present, are coming to be judged very largely by their attitude on the "woman question." The Bible has not escaped this scrutiny. Severe criticism has been passed upon it by well-meaning but enthusiastic women, because, it is alleged, it treats woman with little or no consideration, and does not ascribe to her her true importance. In accordance with this criticism, a movement has even been in contemplation, looking to the issuance of a "Woman's Bible," with the idea of placing woman in her proper sphere, and extending due recognition to her.

It seems that this criticism and the resultant movement are based upon a mistaken idea of the attitude of the Bible on the woman question. The fact is, the Bible is a book of history, prophecy, and religious instruction, and not in any sense a treatise on woman's place in society. Those who look in the Bible to find something authoritative

on this subject will be disappointed. Not even Paul's famous declaration that woman is the glory of man, as man is the glory of God, can be construed as an opinion on this subject. Neither can his statement that it is a shame for women to speak in the church. Both of these were written in harmony with the customs and ideas of the Greeks regarding women, and Paul knew how the reputation of the Christian women would suffer if they should disregard these customs. To protect them from such adverse criticism, he advised them not to assume all the prerogatives which Christianity rightly vouchsafed to them, and not to give too much prominence to the newly-asserted fact of their equality with men.

So it would be possible to go through the Bible, both negatively and positively, and point out the fact that woman has received recognition in the sacred record equal, if not superior, to that accorded her by any profane work on similar subjects, of ancient or modern date. But it is the aim of this volume to treat the subject historically rather than philosophically, and with this idea in view, the most important female characters in the Bible will be considered.

The women of the Bible may be divided into two classes; those whose influence has been intrinsically evil, and those whose lives have been productive of good. The lives of the two classes are so clearly depicted in the Bible, that there is no difficulty in determining the status of each case.

WOMEN OF THE BIBLE.



I. SARAH AND HAGAR.

It was the golden age of idolatry in the plain of Shinar. The descendants of Nimrod, the great son of the Hamite, Cush, had commenced the development of that civilization which has rendered the memory of the Euphrates valley famous to all ages. Mingled with these great Cushites, and oppressed by them almost beyond endurance, were many descendants of Shem. Some of these, the sons of Asshur, had already fled from the hated tyranny, and had reached the upper waters of the Tigris river, where they had founded the flourishing empire of Assyria, with its capital at Nineveh. Others, descendants of Arphaxad, still remained under the oppression, but rebelled against it in their secret hearts. Among them was a patriarch named Terah, with his three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. The last of these died, leaving a son, Lot. Abram had married, in his young manhood, a woman ten years younger than himself, the beautiful Sarai. This woman, afterwards known as Sarah, is the subject of this sketch.

While Abram and his wife were yet in their early prime, his father Terah, with Lot, Abram, and Sarai, escaped from the oppression and idolatry of the Cushites, and traveled northwest into upper Mesopotamia, the region of Hâran. Here they made a temporary resting place; and here after a time, Terah died. Abram took his wife and his nephew Lot and went down to Canaan, there to escape the idolatry of his kinsmen. Here the wifely devotion of Sarai begins to be emphasized. Fleeing from famine, they went down into Egypt, where the king, with despotic desire, took Sarai into his harem, her beauty having been praised to him by his courtiers. No more delicate compliment to her charms could possibly have been paid by the most gallant and devoted lover, than is couched in the words of her husband: "Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon; therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, 'This is his wife;' and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive." And according to Jewish tradition, the praise was well merited. Quoting from a Jewish writer, Grace Aguilar: "This part of Sarai's history gives us information generally very interesting to young female readers—that she was very beautiful; * * * * endowed, as her history gives us authority to suppose, with a quiet, retiring dignity, which greatly enhanced her beauty, and rendered it yet more interesting than that of girlhood."

Abram's fears for her were well founded; but

she was saved from being wronged, through the interposition of God's special providence. For her sake, however, Pharaoh treated Abram well, sending him out of the country with rich gifts.

A similar experience to this was had by Abram and Sarai some years later in the land of Gerar, when Abimelech tried to take Sarai into his harem.

Returning to Canaan, Abram passed through the stirring scenes incident to the first years of his settlement in that country; the separation from Lot, the battle with the kings, the meeting with Melchizedek, the renewal of God's covenant, and the removal to Hebron. In these incidents Sarai took only a subordinate part, her daily work in the patriarch's tent occupying her full attention, and determining her true sphere.

But it is in connection with the promise of posterity to Abram, that Sarai possesses greatest interest for us. The details into which the Bible narrative goes on this subject prove the human interest which pervades the book, and show how tenderly it regards the joys and sorrows of women. The promise had been made and reiterated that Abram's own child, and not merely a servant "born in his house," should be his heir. That Sarai could be the mother of this child, seemed to her impossible. Therefore, with commendable generosity both to her husband and to Hagar, she gave her handmaid to Abram as a wife, that through her the promise might be fulfilled. To a woman of Sarai's proud and sensitive nature, such an act could have been

prompted only by love and a profound sense of duty. Nor is the pain which the sacrifice occasioned, diminished by the historian. As soon as Hagar found herself more fortunately situated than Sarai, "her mistress was despised in her eyes," and Hagar was severely reprovèd and chastised by the righteously indignant Sarai. In offended pride, Hagar fled from her mistress into the wilderness, where an angel met her and commanded her to return to Sarai and submit to her authority. When her son Ishmael was born, Hagar was no less than before the handmaid of Sarai, though the mother of Abram's child.

It was now made known to Abram that his chosen posterity was not to come through Hagar's son, but through Sarai's. This child was to be in the highest degree a gift from God. In token of this promised gift, and the multitude of people to spring from him, his mother's name was changed to Sarah, "a princess," and his father's to Abraham, "a father of a multitude."

There can be found in literature no more charming picture of domestic life or hearty hospitality than that drawn in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis. No detail of the busy life of the wife, or the husband's hospitable efforts to make his guests comfortable, is omitted. And Sarah's importance in the interesting discussion is properly emphasized. The heavenly beings had come to Abraham to renew the promise of a son, and to emphasize the former covenant. Sarah was to be

the blessed one; was to have the happiness of motherhood; was to laugh with joy at the goodness of God, in making her the medium of fulfilling His covenant with Abraham.

At length the promise was fulfilled. At ninety years of age, Sarah bore a son to Abraham, and called him Isaac, "laughter," saying, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me." The joy of the first few years of Sarah's newly-found happiness was marred by the jealousy of Ishmael, who now found himself deposed from his position as Abraham's heir, and his place taken by another. That suspicious eyes should be cast by Hagar upon Isaac, and by Sarah upon Ishmael, is not to be wondered at. The crisis came when a feast was made in honor of the weaning of Isaac. In his anger and jealousy, Ishmael, now about sixteen years old, stood mocking Isaac. This was more than Sarah could endure. "Cast out the bondwoman and her son," said she to Abraham, "for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

Abraham's trying position may well be imagined. He loved both his wives and both his children. To cast off Hagar and her son, and place them upon their own resources, was a most difficult duty. Yet it seemed to be clearly his duty, and his love for Sarah and her "child of promise" left no other course open to him. The word of God came to him, telling him not to be grieved at

the requirement made of him, for the Lord would care for Hagar and her son, but in Isaac Abraham's seed was to be called. Accordingly, Abraham gave to Hagar and Ishmael a loaf of bread and a bottle of water, and sent them away, never to see them again. The pathetic incident of the spent water, the threatened death of Ishmael, and the miraculous deliverance by the angel, is worthy of the pen of a poet, so full is it of human interest and sympathy.

The incident has received treatment at the hands of one of our most tender and graceful poets, N. P. Willis. A few extracts from the poem "Hagar in the Wilderness," will be quoted:

"He gave to her the water and the bread,
But spoke no word, and trusted not himself
To look upon her face, but laid his hand
In silent blessing on the fair-haired boy,
And left her to her lot of loneliness.

"She went her way with a strong step and slow—
Her press'd lips arch'd, and her clear eye undimm'd,
As if it were a diamond, and her form
Borne proudly up, as if her heart breathed through.

"The boy

Hung down his head and opened his parch'd lips
For water; but she could not give it him.
She laid him down beneath the sultry sky—
For it was better than the close, hot breath
Of the thick pines—and tried to comfort him.

"She sat a little longer, and he grew
Ghastly and faint, as if he would have died.

She lifted him

And bore him further on, and laid his head
Beneath the shadow of a desert shrub;

And shrouding up her face, she went away,
And sat to watch, where he could see her not,
Till he should die; and watching him, she mourn'd:—

“ ‘God stay thee in thine agony; my boy!
I cannot see thee die; I cannot brook
Upon thy brow to look—
And see death settle on my cradle joy.
How have I drunk the light of thy blue eye!
And could I see thee die?’

“ ‘Oh, no! and when I watch’d by thee the while,
And saw thy bright lip curling in thy dream,
And thought of the dark stream
In my own land of Egypt, the far Nile,
How prayed I that my father’s land might be
A heritage for thee!

“ ‘And now the grave for its cold breast has won thee!
And thy white, delicate limbs the earth will press;
And oh! my last caress
Must feel thee cold, for a chill hand is on thee.
How can I leave my boy, so pillow’d there
Upon his clustering hair!’

“ ‘She stood beside the well her God had given
To gush in that deep wilderness, and bath’d
The forehead of her child until he laugh’d
In his reviving happiness, and lisp’d
His infant thought of gladness at the sight
Of the cool plashing of his mother’s hand.’”

In this incident Sarah is accused of undue harshness. But the outcome proved the contrary. Had Ishmael been permitted to remain near Isaac, there is no doubt that endless feuds over property and prestige would have risen between them and their descendants. As it was, however, Ishmael departed into the desert regions of Arabia, there to live a wild, lawless life, leaving Isaac to the

peaceful enjoyment of his heritage. The two brothers met but once again—at the burial of their father.

It is in her influence over her son that Sarah's character is most strongly marked. An only child, and so essentially a child of promise, he would naturally receive the richest outpourings of a mother's devotion. For thirty-seven years, or until her death, Isaac remained under her care and submitted quietly to her guidance. As will be developed in the succeeding sketch, it was probably this fact that rendered him so submissive to his wife, whom he married three years after his mother's death.

But that the mother's influence was of a most beneficial nature, there is no doubt. In the character which he maintained during his life, the nobility of her own was reflected. The first fruits of this labor of love were seen in his quiet submission to his father's sorrowful request that he become a sacrificial offering. Though twenty-five years old, according to the generally accepted chronology, the young man manifested a willingness to submit to the authority of his father and the will of God, which speaks unmistakably of the mother's training and its salutary effect. So perfect was this submissiveness, that it is spoken of as like unto that displayed by a greater One on Calvary. Surely no higher praise can be given to the love and influence of a mother. Sarah was spared the pain of knowing, in advance, of God's

commandment that Isaac be sacrificed; and the return of the father and son from Moriah gave to her assurance of a new bond of union between her husband and God. Abraham, she knew, was now "the friend of God," in a new and holier sense;—his action a prototype of God's sacrifice of His only Son.

But little more is recorded of the life of Sarah. To have borne such a son and given him, by her careful training and influence, such a character, was the crowning glory of her laborious, self-sacrificing life. And the record which brings into such prominence the lasting influence of Sarah's labor, cannot, surely, be judged deficient in respect and reverence for woman. But the pathetic account of her death and burial should be briefly considered. At the age of 127 years, she died. "And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." We judge that Isaac's grief was still more deep and lasting than his father's. He mourned his mother's death for three years, and it was not until his marriage with Rebekah that he "was comforted after his mother's death." In no other history, it may be said, is more pathos exhibited in the account of a woman's death, or a higher tribute paid to the lasting influence of her life.

It may not be amiss at this point to draw a comparison between the two women, Sarah and Hagar. That both were beautiful, there is no doubt. Hagar was of Egypt—a land noted for beautiful and voluptuous women. If, as we have

reason to suppose was the case, she was one of the gifts bestowed upon Abraham and Sarah by the repentant Pharaoh, she would doubtless be one of the most beautiful of the slave class.

The two women were, by nature, high strung and sensitive. In Sarah's case this disposition was so strongly marked at first, as to give us a reason for her original name, Sarai, "contentious." But we have already seen that this disposition afterwards became softened into tender solicitude for husband and son; marked, however, upon occasion by a firm determination to protect the interests of Isaac. That Hagar's haughty disposition was ever softened we very much doubt. As Willis says:

"May slighted woman turn,
And, as a vine the oak hath shaken off,
Bend lightly to her leaning trust again?
O, no—by all her loveliness—by all
That makes life poetry and beauty—no!
Make her a slave; steal from her rosy cheek
By needless jealousies: let the last star
Leave her a watcher by your couch of pain;
Wrong her by petulance, suspicion, all
That makes her cup a bitterness, yet give
One evidence of love, and earth has not
An emblem of devotedness like hers.
But, oh! estrange her once—it boots not how—
By wrong or silence—anything that tells
A change has come upon your tenderness—
And there is not a feeling out of heaven
Her pride o'ermastereth not."

This pride, increased by the wrong which she considered had been done her, she bequeathed to

her son; and his history and that of his descendants, the Arabs, was influenced by it for ages. Ishmael's was not the pliant, malleable nature, softened in the warm glow of a mother's chastened love; rather was it chill-tempered by her pride. Hence the difference between him and Isaac; and hence, in great degree, the different histories of their descendants. That the hand of Ishmael and his people was "against every man, and every man's hand against him." was due, I believe, as much to his mother's influence as to any other cause. So high is the Bible estimate of a mother's power over her children.

Quoting again from the Jewess, Grace Aguilar: "We have little more to add on the spiritual lesson and divine consolation which Sarah's life presents to her female descendants. * * * * We may imitate her faithfulness in all her household duties—her love and reverence to her husband—her tenderness to her child—her quiet, unpretending, yet dignified fulfillment of all which she was called upon to do. We may learn from her to set no value on personal charms, save as they may enhance the gratification of those who love us best; or on rank and station, save as they demand from us yet deeper gratitude towards God, and more extended usefulness towards man. We may learn, too, from her history, that it is better to wait for the Lord—to leave in his hands the fulfillment of our ardent wishes—than to seek to compass them by human means. We may trace and feel that

nothing, in truth, is too wonderful for the Lord; that he will do what pleaseth Him, however we may deem it hopeless and in vain."

And, it may be added, Sarah's life pre-eminently teaches that no other field of endeavor, no matter how broad or productive, gives to woman's efforts as great scope, or promises her as rich fruits of honor and contentment, as the home, with its joys and responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood.



II. REBEKAH.

Although Rebekah belongs to the same general class with Sarah, viz., women who have used their influence for good, she is found to be different in many essential characteristics. It will be the task here to trace the general influence of her life, and to point out the particulars in which she presented likeness and contrast to her mother-in-law, Sarah.

As has been said, when Abram, Sarai, and Lot left Haran, in upper Mesopotamia, Nahor, Abram's brother, remained behind. Nahor's son, Bethuel, lived also at Haran, and here were born to him several children, among them Laban and Rebekah. These two first come into the Bible history, in connection with the errand of Abraham's servant to Haran, to obtain a wife for Isaac. Abraham was anxious that his son should not marry a wife from among the Canaanites. He therefore told his servant to go to his own kindred in Mesopotamia, and use every effort to secure a wife for Isaac from among them. His meeting with Rebekah at the well is one of the striking romantic episodes of the Bible. Her willingness to furnish water for him and his camels was considered by

him an indication of success in his errand, and he would not rest until he had made a formal proposal of marriage in behalf of his master's son.

The immediate acceptance of this offer by Rebekah has been taken by some as an indication of her selfishness and lack of home affection. That she was somewhat crafty and calculating, there is no doubt; but it is a little questionable if these characteristics were shown in her willingness immediately to leave her home and accept a husband whom she had never seen. It must be remembered that among the orientals the goal of a woman's highest ambition is husband and children. And in the case of Rebekah, the offer seemed to be so distinctly of the Lord, that there could be no doubt of her duty to accept it immediately. The hasty departure from her home was due to the servant's eager desire to report to his master the success of his errand. Accordingly, on the following day Rebekah bade farewell to her mother and brothers, and departed for the home of her betrothed husband.

As she approached the place, she saw him walking in the field in meditation. Hearing from the servant that the man she saw was Isaac, she dismounted from her camel, and covered herself with her veil. Isaac met her, took her to his mother's tent, and married her. For the first time in three years, he was comforted after his mother's death.

This is a typical eastern courtship and mar-

riage. Before the two parties to the contract met, there had been betrothal, bestowal of gifts, giving of the bride by her guardians, and there remained to be performed after the first meeting only the ceremonial of introducing the bride into her new home.

In order to gain a proper understanding of the subsequent history of Isaac and Rebekah, it is necessary at this point to consider briefly the comparative natures of the two. As was stated in the preceding chapter, Isaac had been softly nurtured by his mother, and had developed into an affectionate, easy-going, peace-loving man. He was of a yielding nature, willing to forego his own rights and privileges, if necessary, to secure tranquillity. Accustomed from childhood to yield to the wishes of his mother, it is not at all surprising that in manhood he should be inclined to yield to the strong will of his wife. And we are forced by the events of their lives to form the opinion that she was perfectly willing to use her influence over him. Being strong of will, and crafty and calculating of disposition, she, rather than her husband, seems to have determined the trend of events, and shaped the destiny of her family.

After twenty years of married life, the twin sons Esau and Jacob were born to Rebekah. Our greatest interest in her commences with the birth of her sons. Before that event took place, she had gone to the Lord in some perplexity, and had been told that the older of the two should serve the

younger. In some respects it seems unfortunate that she did not wait for God to bring about this design in His own way. But it would perhaps be unfair to judge her, because of our not knowing all the circumstances which arose to influence her in the course she took.

Her actions may be explained, in part at least, by the contrast the dispositions of the two boys presented. Esau had the free, easy, generous disposition of his father, mingled with a certain degree of carelessness. Jacob, on the other hand, was careful, painstaking, crafty, and to a certain degree selfish. It is not surprising, therefore, that Esau was a favorite with his father, and Jacob with his mother. Since the father had the power of bestowing the blessing, Rebekah had reason to fear that Esau and not Jacob would receive it. Hence her great anxiety, both on account of her love for Jacob and on account of the promise made to her in his behalf, to secure the blessing for her favorite son. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that Rebekah took the matter into her own hands, with the determination that Jacob should get the blessing. And it appears that we cannot censure her very severely, considering the trying and anxious position in which she was placed.

She was materially assisted in her plan by the heedless, impulsive Esau selling his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage. He was faint with hunger, and on arriving at his brother's tent was tempted by the smell of the lentils Jacob was pre-

paring. He asked for some of the food. The common laws of hospitality, it would seem, should have prompted Jacob to give food under such circumstances even to a stranger, much more to his brother. But Jacob saw the opportunity of making the first step toward getting power over Esau, and he was not slow to take advantage of it. Therefore, he demanded Esau's birthright in return for the pottage. And "Esau despised his birthright," and sold it.

Both of the men were to blame for this transaction; Jacob for his cruel selfishness, and Esau for his heedlessness. Jacob had no right to take advantage of his brother's faintness and hunger; yet Esau might have waited until he reached the tent of his father, instead of impulsively disposing of the most precious thing he owned.

No doubt Rebekah heard of this sale, and secretly rejoiced at it, for it meant the removal of one of the barriers in the way of Jacob's promotion. How to remove the other, now became the question. It must be remembered that at this time Esau and Jacob were doubtless seventy years old, at least. Isaac, therefore, was old, feeble, and blind. It may be that his mind had settled down into the mingled weakness and stubbornness characteristic of old age. If so, he would be determined to bestow the blessing upon Esau. Yet Esau had proved himself unworthy of the blessing, by his recklessness and by his forbidden marriages with Canaanitish women, which mar-

riages "were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah."

Notwithstanding this unworthiness, Isaac had set a day for bestowing the blessing on his favorite son; and preparatory to the event, had sent him out to get venison and prepare savory meat, that in the midst of the spirit of the sacrificial feast, he might bestow the blessing on Esau. The skilful hunter went joyfully on his way to get the venison, feeling that now his right to rule over Jacob would be confirmed. But we are led to suppose that Rebekah had heard her husband's request and understood the motive. She felt that the supreme moment had come; that she was called upon to thwart Isaac's design, and secure to Jacob his true position.

Hers was a strong temptation; stronger than we can realize. She saw the reckless, impulsive, disobedient hunter at the point of being elevated to supremacy over her obedient, careful, dutiful son. This blessing, if bestowed, would have given to Esau a right of rule over Jacob, which Rebekah knew he did not deserve. She knew that if this power were given him, he would misuse it; and his lack of steadiness would result in confusion and trouble. She felt that she should not allow such a calamity to occur. Accordingly, she yielded to the temptation, and arranged a plan to defeat her husband's will.

Calling Jacob to her, she told him of his father's design regarding Esau. She then told him

to go into the field and kill a kid and bring it to her. This having been done, she prepared the meat her husband desired, and unfolded her plan to Jacob. He was to impersonate Esau, take the meat to Isaac, and receive the blessing. But Jacob had certain scruples against such a course. Some have been unkind enough to say that these arose merely from the fear of being found out, and not from his conviction of the dishonesty of his course. However that may be, these scruples were swept away by Rebekah's persuasion, and her ingenuity in planning to deceive Isaac's sense of touch and of smell. His sight was too dim to require deceiving. To give to Jacob the rough, hairy appearance of Esau, she merely needed to place on his hands and neck the skin of the slaughtered kid. To give to him Esau's peculiar smell (a common means of identification at that time), she placed on him some of Esau's clothing. Thus prepared, he took the sacrificial meal to his father.

There are lies direct and lies indirect. I am sorry to say, that in order to carry out his mother's will, Jacob was forced to both kinds of falsehood. His reason for coming so soon with the meat was that "the Lord brought it to him." But it was the voice of Jacob, and Isaac was a little suspicious. Jacob now made the direct statement that he was Esau. Still doubting, Isaac felt his hands and neck, and was partly reassured. He asked again, however, if the claimant was Esau, and again was answered in the affirmative. Then

Isaac ate and drank, and under the influence of the spirit of prophecy he called Jacob to him, smelled Esau's raiment, and, relieved of all doubt, proceeded to bestow upon him the blessing.

We can scarcely imagine Rebekah's feelings as she witnessed this transaction. Joy at the success of her deception; fear lest Esau should come while Jacob was with his father; and remorse at having resorted to such a course, must have been peculiarly blended. But the plan succeeded. Jacob received the blessing and went out just before Esau came in. Then arose the "great and exceeding bitter cry" from Esau, which must have rung through the tent, and pierced the souls of Rebekah and Jacob, destroying whatever joy they had in their triumph.

But Rebekah's fears were increased still more when it became known to her that Esau was determined to kill Jacob, "the supplanter," who had twice stepped in between him and his hopes. To avoid this she called Jacob to her and told him to take his journey to Padan Aram, her native country, and there remain until his brother's anger should pass away. We think from what occurs in the latter part of the 27th chapter of Genesis, that Rebekah had another object in sending Jacob away. She was anxious that he should not marry among the surrounding Canaanites. She therefore desired that he should go to her native place and find wives among her own kindred. Accordingly, he prepared for the journey, and after a

leave-taking rendered all the more sad by the fact that he was destined never to see his mother again, he set out for Mesopotamia. This episode closes the Biblical account of the life of Rebekah. We are left entirely in doubt as to the time or circumstances of her death.

Sufficient has been said in this brief treatise to show, in general, the character of Rebekah. Intensely devoted to her favorite son, and ambitious for his welfare, she was willing to become crafty and deceitful in order to do him good. Not weak and yielding, but strong of mind and will, she bent all her energies to the advancement of the interests of her family, and to keeping it untainted with Gentile blood. And although we cannot fully excuse her artfulness and deception at the great crisis of the lives of her sons, yet we are inclined to think that a woman of weaker will might, at this and other important junctures, have allowed matters to develop in a way directly contrary to the interests of all concerned. "In the light of the difference of character in Esau and Jacob," says Geikie, "the eagerness of Rebekah to secure for her favorite, Jacob, the blessing so utterly disregarded by his brother, is more easily understood, though no excuse can be offered for the treacherous and selfish means by which it was obtained; means sorely punished by the course of his future life, for Rebekah never saw Jacob again after his exile, and Jacob had to toil for over twenty years, far from home, so dear to an orien-

tal, instead of sharing the ease and wealth of his father's tents."

Let us, therefore, consider the good accomplished for the Hebrews by this strong, good woman, and not condemn her, as we are prone to do, for one act, which, perhaps, we cannot understand, but which we are likely to judge harshly because it does not agree with our theoretical standards of ethics. It is the occasion and the motive of the act, not the mere act itself, which must be ethically judged. Let it be remembered that the characteristics of strength and steadiness which Rebekah gave to her son Jacob, did much to render him capable of becoming "Israel, a prince of God," and the great progenitor of the Israel of ancient and of modern days.



III. THE WIVES OF JACOB.

The story of Jacob's journey to Mesopotamia is familiar to all who have even a slight acquaintance with the Bible. His avoiding contaminating association with the Canaanites, preferring to sleep in the open field; his wonderful dream of the ladder reaching into heaven; his changing the name of the place from Luz to Bethel, "the house of God;" his vow of devotion to God in his future life, are interesting elements of a well-known story. His arrival at Haran was marked by an incident even more romantic than the one which occurred, probably at the same well, in the case of his mother Rebekah. On reaching the well just outside the village of Haran, he learned from the shepherds gathered there that his uncle Laban lived near, and that doubtless he would soon have the privilege of seeing his cousin Rachel. Soon she appeared, leading her father's flocks to the well to give them water. As he saw her, beautiful of face and form, with lustrous, gazelle-like eyes, and the strength, grace, and freedom of movement acquired from her out-door life, he became at once a most devoted lover. The devotion so suddenly inspired he felt for her until her death; and long

after she passed away he referred most pathetically to his beloved Rachel and his great affection for her.

Having assisted Rachel to water her father's flocks, Jacob was introduced by her to Laban, who welcomed him gladly. After a month, during which time Jacob showed great diligence, Laban asked him on what terms he would continue laboring. Then commenced the bargaining and counter-bargaining, the plotting and counter-plotting between the two men, which lasted twenty years, and proved Jacob to be more than a match for Laban in shrewdness and in the accumulation of wealth. Jacob named as the wages of the first seven years, Laban's daughter Rachel. To get seven years of service from such a man as Jacob, and obtain at the same time so favorable a marriage for his daughter, seemed to Laban a double stroke of fortune. Therefore, he willingly consented. "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

But Laban seems to have been so crafty and unreliable as to be incapable of giving due reward for service rendered. Accordingly, when the wedding feast was made, he took advantage of the fact that in the east brides come to their husbands veiled, and brought to Jacob Rachel's sister Leah, who was older than Rachel, "tender eyed," and, as Josephus says, "of no comely countenance." The next morning Jacob discovered the fraud

which had been practiced upon him, and angrily demanded an explanation. The wily Laban explained that in that country it was not customary to give the younger daughter before the elder; but as a reparation, he would, in a week, give Rachel to Jacob on condition that he serve seven years more for her. Therefore, at the close of Leah's marriage week, Rachel was given to Jacob, and he had the consolation of receiving his next seven years' wages in advance.

It will now be necessary to review briefly the position in which these two wives of one man were placed, and compare the characteristics of the two. Leah was at a disadvantage from the first. Jacob had been tricked into marrying her, and his very scant love for her is even mentioned as hatred. This term, however, means that he did not love her so well as he loved Rachel. Leah must have known this from the first, and grieved over it. It was a sore trial to her to see her husband bestow the wealth of his affection on her beautiful sister; for we are led to believe that Jacob openly manifested his preference for Rachel.

The dearest wish of an oriental woman's heart, and the surest means of endearing her to her husband, is the bearing of children. Leah, feeling that she was particularly in need of this blessing, prayed for it continually. Her prayer was answered; she bore to Jacob four sons in succession—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Through her children, Leah became endeared to her husband,

as Rachel was endeared to him through her own personal charms. But Rachel became envious of her sister; and since she herself was denied the gift of children, she gave to him her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife, with the intention of adopting as her own the children of this union. Two sons were born to Bilhah, Dan and Naphtali, and these Rachel used as a further means of securing her husband's favor. Not to be outdone, Leah resorted to a similar stratagem, giving to Jacob her handmaid, Zilpah. Her two sons, Gad and Asher, were adopted by Leah, and became the means of counterbalancing the influence exerted in Rachel's favor by the sons of Bilhah.

Perhaps it should be remarked here that ordinarily the sons of handmaids, such as Bilhah and Zilpah, since these women were, apparently, only concubines of Jacob, would not fall heir to any portion of their father's property. We have a striking instance of this in the case of the children of Abraham's concubines, Hagar and Keturah. But in the case of the concubines of Jacob, his wives of the first degree, Leah and Rachel, adopted the sons of their handmaids, and thus made them heirs on the same footing as their own sons. Therefore, these men are always counted among the twelve sons of Jacob.

Before the birth of Rachel's first child, Leah bore three more children, two sons, Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah. At length, after years of waiting and longing, a son was born to

Rachel, whom she named Joseph. At last "her reproach was taken away."

There is something pathetic in this full and explicit account of the struggles, envies, jealousies, aspirations, sorrows, joys, hopes, and disappointments of these two sisters. So true to life is it, especially to oriental life, that we of another country, and even we of another sex, can enter into these plots and plans, these stratagems and counter-stratagems, with the utmost sympathy. It is our common humanity, especially in its frailties, which enables us to comprehend the vividly drawn picture of such feelings and actions as made up the history of Jacob's twenty-years' stay in Mesopotamia. Surely it cannot be said that a record which goes thus minutely into the lives of women, when those lives are purely domestic, is at all lacking in the interest manifested in the fair sex.

It was only during the last six or seven years of Jacob's stay in Mesopotamia that he received from Laban any real reward for his labor; to marry Laban's daughters was as much a benefit to their father as to himself. So greatly did Jacob prosper during this time, that Laban and his sons became envious of him, and it was found necessary for him to depart hastily and secretly from that country. An incident of this flight reveals to us a phase of the character of Rachel, and we are almost led to wish that the historian had omitted it. But the Bible is preeminently true to life, and the failings of its

heroes and heroines are not hidden from view. When Rachel fled with her husband, she carried with her her father's household gods, for no other purpose, so far as we can understand, than idolatry. When Laban overtook the fleeing company, and angrily and sorrowfully demanded the return of those images, Rachel denied having them, and thus made her husband, in a sense, a partaker of her guilt; for he had sworn to Laban that the one in whose possession the images were found should be put to death, thus staking the lives of his company on their innocence.

Rachel's part in this transaction it is rather difficult to understand. By some commentators she has been judged very harshly. Dr. Smith, in his Dictionary of the Bible, says: "From what is related to us concerning her character, there does not seem much to claim any high degree of admiration and esteem. The discontent and fretful impatience shown in her grief at being for a time childless, moved even her fond husband to anger. She appears, moreover, to have shared all the duplicity and falsehood of her family. See, for instance, Rachel's stealing her father's images, and the ready dexterity and presence of mind with which she concealed her theft. From this incident we may also infer that she was not altogether free from the superstitions and idolatry which prevailed in the land whence Abraham had been called."

This judgment appears a little harsh. We are not at all sure of Rachel's motive in what she did,

and judgment of a bare act may be entirely wrong.

Having failed to secure his teraphim, Laban made a covenant with Jacob, containing a promise that neither people would pass the boundary line of Gilead to do harm to the other. Laban then bade his children a last farewell and returned to his home, while Jacob made his way toward Canaan.

A few more incidents in the lives of Jacob's wives deserve mention. Rachel's example in carrying away her father's images seems to have been followed by others of the company. They had with them amulets and idolatrous charms of different kinds, which were used for purposes contrary to the pure worship of Jehovah. These were all gathered together with the teraphim which Rachel had, and buried under the oak at Shechem. Thus the camp was purged from all idolatry.

Rachel's death forms one of the most pathetic incidents of Bible history. Her son Joseph was probably fifteen years old, when another son was given her. This boy was born just north of Bethlehem, and at his birth Rachel died. As she was dying, she called the boy Benoni, "son of my sorrow;" but he was afterwards called Benjamin, "the son of my fortune." The burial of his beloved Rachel "in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath," is pathetically referred to by Jacob long afterwards, when, just before his death, he blessed Joseph's sons. She was a fond memory to him even when he was about to

go down to the grave to her. Who can believe that a woman who was at all unworthy would be so tender a memory to such a man as Jacob? For my part, I prefer to think that she was what he thought her to be, worthy of his deepest devotion notwithstanding her few faults, which modern critics seem disposed to magnify.

Slowly Jacob traveled southward to his old home, which he reached after an absence of probably thirty-five years. During his absence his mother had died, and his father had come to the verge of the grave. Shortly after Jacob's arrival Isaac died, and Esau and Jacob buried him.

It was at this time that an event happened which caused a double sorrow to Jacob during the rest of his life. His oldest son, Reuben, "his might and the beginning of his strength," in whom he had the brightest hopes, disappointed those hopes and embittered his father's after-life by committing sin with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine, and mother of two of his children. So powerful an impression did the disgrace of his concubine make upon Jacob's mind, that he made it the occasion of depriving Reuben of his birthright, and referred to it most feelingly when blessing his children. How much light this incident throws on the character of Bilhah it is difficult to say. It may be remarked, however, that if the handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah are to be judged by the traits of their sons, our estimate of their moral character would not be very high. (Genesis 37: 2.)

The only remaining mention of Leah personally is the reference by Jacob in Genesis 49:31, that before he went to live in Egypt she had died, and he had buried her in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham, Sarah, Rebekah, and Isaac were buried.

So far as the character of Leah and Rachel may be gained from the history, it is before the reader. A few words by way of summary, may not be out of place. The Syrians, with whom Laban and his family are classed, were noted for their craftiness and jealousy of disposition. This fact must be taken into account in passing judgment on the peculiar events of their lives. That the two sisters should be extremely envious of each other and jealous of the love and attentions of their husband, was perfectly natural. It was just as inevitable that, with their crafty dispositions, they should enter into many plots to win his favor. The record gives us no reason to suppose, however, that any great degree of enmity arose between them. It must be remembered that feeling is strongly emphasized—even exaggerated—in the Bible. Hence we are inclined to interpret the little, petty jealousies which sprang up between the two sisters, and which are mentioned in such detail, into strong enmity and hatred. I believe the record, if properly understood, does not justify any such opinion. But it does show how deeply interested the writers of the Scriptures were in the feelings and the mission of women.

IV. MIRIAM.

One of the most striking and admirable characters in Bible history, and one whom we are likely to neglect or to understand but poorly, is Miriam, the sister of Moses. And this for the reason that her personality is largely hidden behind that of her great brother. But when we look more closely into her life, with all its changes and vicissitudes, with all its toils and sacrifices, we discover traits which challenge our sincerest admiration.

Miriam was the daughter of Amram and Jochebed, a Levite couple, and was born in Egypt when the Israelites had lived in that country some one hundred and thirty years. No doubt the cruel oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians had already commenced at her birth, although it is thought that at this time it had not assumed its worst form. The Israelites were being put at forced labor on the great public works of the Pharaoh who was then reigning; making brick, shaping and hauling stone, preparing and carrying mortar, and assisting in other ways in the erection of the buildings and cities which are a wonder to the modern world, even in their ruins. Apparently the king had a double object in thus oppressing

the Israelites. The first was the erection of the buildings themselves, for the Pharaohs were great builders, and considered that much of the glory of their reigns would consist in the number and magnificence of the edifices they constructed. Secondly, the Israelites were becoming very numerous, and doubtless the Pharaohs thought that their rapid increase endangered the Egyptian throne.

It should be remembered that the Israelites were of the Semitic race, while the Egyptians were descended from Ham, and were surrounded and threatened by Semitic enemies. Hence their reason for suspicion that in case of invasion by any of these Semitic tribes, the Hebrews would assist in overturning the Egyptian rule. As it is well known that the cruel, forced labor of slaves in Egypt resulted in the death of thousands annually, it is easy to see how the Egyptians could hope thus to accomplish the destruction, or at least the weakening, of the Hebrew race. It was doubtless in the midst of these trying events that Miriam was born.

Her birth was followed about three years later by that of a son, who was called Aaron.

We have reason to believe that the enforced labor of the Hebrews was not resulting in a sufficient number of deaths, for "the Lord was with them." Therefore, about the time of Aaron's birth, an order was issued to the effect that the midwives should kill all the male children of the Israelites at birth; but the women utterly refused

to carry out the order. Hence other steps, still more cruel, were taken. The officers of the king were authorized to break into the houses of the Hebrews, wherever the cry of an infant was heard, and put the child to death if it was a boy.

It was while this cruel edict was in force that Miriam's younger brother, Moses, was born. He was probably seven or eight years younger than Miriam. It is in connection with the birth and infancy of this child that Miriam is first mentioned in the Bible narrative, and then not by name. The mother hid the child in the house as long as she could do so; but at length, fearing that his crying would attract the attention of the officers of Pharaoh, she placed him on the river in an ark of bulrushes, and set Miriam to watch him. All are familiar with the story of the daughter of Pharaoh finding the child, and having compassion on him. But special attention should be called to the presence of mind and calmness of the little girl in suggesting that she find a nurse for the babe, and then going and bringing his own mother. The effect of this course on the later life of Moses was doubtless very important. The teachings and spirit of his mother while he was an infant must have strongly influenced his later life, and prevented his falling completely under the control and the opinions of the Egyptians while he was being educated by them. Therefore, we may say that his leaning toward the Hebrews, which led him to espouse their cause against the Egyptians

when he reached manhood, was due, at least indirectly, to the wisdom and presence of mind of his sister Miriam.

The development of this girl to a beautiful and useful womanhood, is not dwelt upon in the Bible. We know from other sources, however, that she married a man, famous in Bible history, and known by the name of Hur. He it was who, with Aaron, held up the hands of Moses while Joshua and the army fought with the Amalekites, thus assisting in gaining the victory for Israel. Only one of her children is mentioned, Uri, and he only on account of being the father of Bezalcel, one of the architects of the tabernacle.

But it is chiefly as the sister of Moses and Aaron, "a prophetess," and one of "the three deliverers," that she is known to us. And we find her fully entitled to all the names of honor which the writers of Israel apply to her. Details, so far as they are known, of the circumstances through which she passed in order to gain these distinguished titles, will now be given.

She was probably eighty-seven years old, at least, when Moses returned from Midian to Egypt to lead the people out of that land. It was an advanced age for a woman who was called upon to pass through the hardships and trials of a journey from which even young, strong men drew back abashed. But we have no idea that she was appalled by these difficulties; on the contrary, we have every reason to believe that she entered into

the labors and burdens of the journey as one of its leaders, and with true zeal and undaunted spirit. As the great company of refugees passed slowly and laboriously out of Egypt to the Red Sea, picking up new recruits in the mines, quarries, and other public works on the way, great was the need of such a ministering, helping comforter as Miriam must have been. Women, bending under the weight of years, or the burdens of maternity; children, halting with weakness and sickness; old men, tottering feebly through the parched and burning sand of the wilderness, were, no doubt, equal partakers of her help and comfort. Hers was no ordinary spirit; rather was it one which met, nobly and bravely, every difficulty and every vicissitude.

Her first prominent mention in the journey is in connection with the passage of the Red Sea. The rod of Moses had been stretched over the waters, and they had divided hither and thither for the Israelites, and had returned to their place and swallowed up the Egyptians in their depths. The triumphant song of Moses and the men of Israel, which is found in Exodus 15, was sounded over the water in praise to God. "And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

"And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Or, as it is so beautifully rendered by the poet, Thomas Moore, in his sublime hymn:

“Sound the loud timbrel o’er Egypt’s dark sea!
Jehovah has triumphed—His people are free.
Sing—for the pride of the tyrant is broken,
His chariots and horsemen, all splendid and brave;
How vain was their boasting!—the Lord hath but spoken
And chariots and horsemen are sunk in the wave.
Sound the loud timbrel o’er Egypt’s dark sea!
Jehovah has triumphed—His people are free.

“Praise to the Conqueror, praise to the Lord,
His word was our arrow. His breath was our sword!—
Who shall return to tell Egypt the story
Of those she sent forth in the hour of her pride?
For the Lord hath looked out from His pillar of glory,
And all her brave thousands are dashed in the tide.
Sound the loud timbrel o’er Egypt’s dark sea!
Jehovah has triumphed—His people are free.”

Thus “Miriam, the prophetess,” becomes known to us by name for the first time. Her prophetic power, or the power to speak in the name of the Lord, was manifested in music, songs, and processions of dancers. This method afterward became common, especially for the expression of intense joy, as, for example, in the case of David (2 Samuel 6: 14-21).

The next incident in which Miriam appears is a most sorrowful one. She and Aaron became incensed at Moses because, as it appears, he had insisted, though a younger brother, upon maintaining his place as the prophet and mouthpiece of God. In their rebellious mood they endeavored

to find something in his earlier life which they could use against him. They hit upon his marriage with an Ethiopian woman. Whether this woman was Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, whom Moses married in Midian, or an Ethiopian woman whom, Josephus tells us, he married while he still lived in Egypt, the Bible does not tell us. I rather incline to the latter opinion, although this marriage is not directly mentioned in the Bible.

When Miriam and Aaron thus rebelled against Moses, the Lord manifested great anger, and expressed His will in strong words of commendation for the great law-giver, and rebuke for his brother and sister. "With him [Moses] will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore, then, were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

When the Lord departed, and the cloud denoting His presence passed away from the tabernacle, "behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow." It would seem from this that the Lord regarded her as the chief offender; and no doubt she was of stronger will than Aaron, and hence more likely to lead him in the murmuring against Moses. This was a terrible calamity. She was now unclean, and must be cast out of the camp, and considered the same as dead.

For such an awful fate as this to befall such a woman, seemed to Moses and Aaron beyond endurance. Therefore, Aaron made intercession for

her with Moses, and Moses with the Lord. Their prayers in her behalf were answered, and she was healed, but not until she had been cast out of the camp for seven days. During that period the camp remained stationary.

Miriam is mentioned but once in the remainder of the history, and that is where her death is recorded. We are left somewhat in doubt as to the time when this occurred. I am of opinion that it may safely be placed in the latter part of the forty years' wanderings. The place of her death was Kadesh Barnea, in the Wilderness of Zin. She was probably 127 years old when she died.

An estimate of the character of Miriam has doubtless already been made by the reader. A brief statement of the most important traits of this great and good woman will serve to fix them more clearly and forcibly in mind, and to depict her as an example to the young. Her presence of mind and common sense have already been referred to in connection with her finding a nurse for her brother Moses. That he should be discovered by the daughter of Pharaoh, was probably the last thing she expected. Therefore, her action was in all likelihood not due at all to previous prompting, but to her ready wit.

True womanliness was also manifested not only in this event of her girlhood, but throughout her life. No doubt the later years of her life were rendered pleasant to her more by the skill and achievements of her grandson, Bezaleel, in his

work on the tabernacle of the ark of God, than by the memory of her own great actions. Her womanly instincts were strong enough to lead her into the sacred realms of wifehood and motherhood, and to give her a desire to live in the great deeds of her descendants.

Her strength of character is beyond question. If in one case she allowed this trait to lead her into the grievous error of complaining against God's chosen prophet and leader of the people, in scores of other cases, only a few of which are recorded, she employed her strength of mind as a means of blessing the people. That helpless women and children, in the agonies of the dry and toilsome march, depended upon her iron will and unfailing courage is beyond question. But how they fared, even with her help, during the endless journeyings of thirty-seven years in the wilderness of Zin, we are not informed.

Her prophetic power has already been spoken of. So great was it, and so useful to the traveling Israelites, that Micah classes her as one of the "three deliverers," Moses and Aaron being the other two. Add to these qualities her thorough devotion to the people, and her strength of endurance, and there is a list of good qualities almost without a parallel in the case of any one woman in sacred or profane history. So peerless a woman was "Miriam the prophetess, sister of Moses."

V. RAHAB

Let us try to imagine a day in Jericho, about the middle of the fifteenth century before Christ. Down in the deep valley of the Jordan, probably a full thousand feet below the level of the sea, lies a city, rich with buildings and ornamentation, and strong with walls and towers. To the west rise high, precipitous cliffs, broken here and there by narrow gorges, or canyons, but affording an impassable barrier to the cooling west wind from the great Mediterranean. A short distance to the east, the turbulent Jordan rushes southward "to its grave in the Dead Sea." Some distance to the east of this river rises another range of mountains, as precipitous as those on the west. These two natural walls hem in the city from cooling breezes, and cause it to reek and swelter in the relaxing heat.

Under the influence of such a climate, with the sun pouring down its nearly vertical rays, the city seems almost dead. As the heat waves are seen quivering on the roofs and burnished towers, so do the people quiver and pant beside the bare and unshaded walls; and one gets the full meaning of the mild imprecation, "Go to Jericho!"

The relaxed and enervated inhabitants barely crawl from place to place; and all seem thankful that their city is a commercial gateway, supported by tolls and taxes, and but slightly dependent upon the physical efforts of the people. But as the evening comes on, with its slight moderation of heat, the scene becomes somewhat animated. The baths and other places of public resort are crowded, for the effeminate aristocrats of this wealthy city despise the toils and court the luxuries of life. Some of these resorts, and most of them of questionable repute, are palaces of rich exterior and ornamented interior, and to these the wealthy loungers take their way, there to indulge in the nameless infamies which made Jericho the object of Jehovah's unquenchable wrath. Others are of more humble appearance, some of these being situated on the top of the broad, high walls which surround the city. To this city, and to these public resorts and their inmates, strange rumors have come, rumors of the approach of an invincible people for whom seas have been divided, dry cliffs have poured forth fountains, the skies have rained down manna, and God has destroyed nations and armies.

Some of the inhabitants of the city have heard with fear these rumors, and tremblingly view the white tents of the great hosts beyond the Jordan. Others, insolently secure in their great wealth, and behind their impenetrable walls, laugh with scorn at the approach of the priest-led lot of shepherds.

Toward evening of a certain day, two men were seen entering the city by the east gate just before it was to be closed for the night. They were travel-stained and uncouth in dress. For this and perhaps for other reasons, they avoided the fashionable resorts, with their well-dressed patrons; but as they approached one of the more humble houses on the wall, they cast keen, shrewd eyes on everything, as if inwardly calculating the amount of resistance to be overcome by an invading people.

As the people of Jericho looked askance at the uncouth visitors, a strange, unaccountable fear seized rich and poor alike, and "their hearts melted within them, neither did there remain any more courage in any man." The men entered this place, kept by a woman named Rahab; and word of their coming was at once taken by the people to the king. But night had now fallen, and it was an easy matter for Rahab to conceal her guests, by taking them to the roof of her house and covering them with stalks of flax. As the men of the city rushed into the place and demanded the delivery to them of the two men, who they now strongly suspected were spies from the Hebrew camp, Rahab calmly told them that the men had gone away about the time of the shutting of the gate. Thus deceived, the men hastened in pursuit of the spies. Rahab then went to the roof and spoke kindly to the men, and told them of the abject fear which fell upon the inhabitants of the

city when the approach of the Israelites became known. She told them of the testimony that had come to her heart, of the interposition of God in behalf of the Hebrews, and of the utter uselessness of resistance to their advance. She felt willing to submit herself entirely to the mercy of the invaders, knowing, as she did, that the walls of Jericho could not stand before the power of Jehovah.

We are inclined to think that Rahab was influenced by something more than the mere approach of the hosts of Israel, and the miracles accompanying their march, in reaching this conclusion. There is in some minds an innate faith, which needs only to be aroused by some striking event to spring into full life. Such a faith was in the soul of Rahab. It was warmed into life, I think, by the same causes which chilled the souls of the other inhabitants of Jericho: in her case a yearning for the great Jehovah and his hosts predominating, in theirs a hatred and determined opposition. It is the history of us all; not the outward causes, but the inward condition, determines the results. A calamity befalls us, and a like calamity our neighbors: we are chilled into cold complaining and hardness of feeling against the providence of God; they are bowed down with a grief which, like the cloud dropping warm rain, softens the soul and makes it productive of living, growing faith. Or some good fortune comes to us and to them: we take credit to our-

selves, and sheathe our hearts in the icy armor of pride, they glow with gratitude, and their souls melt in fervent prayers of thankfulness. The history of Jericho is, therefore, the history of the world.

Why Rahab was affected differently from the other inhabitants of Jericho, is one of those things which must always be left unexplained by mortals. We can merely say that it was a part of God's plan that one family of the wicked city which was given over to the licentious worship of Ashtoreth, the goddess of the moon, should be saved from the general destruction, and made a part of Israel.

Rahab kept the spies in hiding until they had acquired all needed information, and then told them to conceal themselves in the mountains until the searchers had scattered in all directions into the wilderness. Before returning to the Israelitish camp at Abel Shittim, "the place of acacias," they made a solemn covenant with her that because she had been touched in her heart by the softening fire of faith in Jehovah, and had afforded protection to the representatives of His people, she and all her house should be saved from the general destruction of Jericho and its inhabitants, upon displaying a given signal. This signal was to consist of a scarlet thread, or rope, hung out of her window, over the wall.

The promise was faithfully kept. The spies returned to the camp and reported that the Lord had already delivered Jericho into the hands of

the Hebrews, through the abject fears of the people. The miraculous crossing of Jordan was effected; the oath and covenant was renewed by circumcision at Gilgal; and the procession was formed for the seven days march around the doomed city.

What feelings were experienced by the inhabitants of Jericho at witnessing this unique attack we can only imagine. The splendidly dressed priests bore the ark, filled with its precious mementoes, and covered with gold and purple. Around the covered symbol of the Divine presence was a strong guard. Preceding and following it were mighty men with trumpets in their hands. These they blew in unison. Following them was the host of the people; and the strange procession marched around the city once a day for six days.

No doubt the people of the city began to view with a certain degree of contempt the progress of this strange attack. We suppose the city was well provisioned, and capable of standing out for an indefinite period against even the strongest foe. But there was one who must have watched the proceedings outside the walls with awe and wonder. Sitting at her window on the summit of the wall, Rahab could see every movement, and she doubtless knew that in some miraculous way the invaders would take the city. Hanging from her lattice, from which she had let down the two spies, was the scarlet cord, which was to be a sign of the mercy of God to her. Probably she alone of

all the inhabitants of the city knew of the approaching triumph of the hosts of the Lord.

The fatal seventh day arrived. Seven times in succession the strange procession made the circuit of the city. As the seventh round was completed, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the people shouted. With a mighty resounding crash, the walls of the city fell. But in the midst of the great confused ruin, a miracle appeared; the house of Rahab, with the section of the wall on which it stood, remained uninjured. The armed hosts of Israel rushed into the city and put to the sword all the inhabitants; for they had so thoroughly polluted themselves that they were considered unfit to live. Their very presence would be a menace to the worship and the morals of the people of God.

But when Rahab's house was reached, she and all her household who had taken refuge there with her, were brought into the camp of Israel alive. Then the work of purification commenced. Everything that could not endure the cleansing of fire was completely destroyed. No risk whatever was to be run of the curses which naturally follow such sins as were practiced by the moon-worshippers being entailed, even by the touch, on the people of Jehovah.

Rahab must herself have undergone a spiritual purification, to prepare her to enter into the Hebrew nation, as a member on equal terms with the rest. So completely was a change wrought in her that she was entirely forgiven for her past sins,

and these were forgotten, together with the contamination which followed them. She was taken into the tribe of Judah not only by adoption but by marriage. She became the wife of Salmon, one of the prominent men of that tribe, and the mother of Boaz, who became the husband of Ruth. The author of the book of Joshua, writing doubtless quite a number of years after the conquest of Jericho, speaks thus of the place of Rahab's descendants in Israel: "And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household and all that she had, and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho."

Her exact place in the genealogy of the great king David and of Christ, is given by Matthew, who distinctly refers to her by the name "Rachab," as the great-grandmother of Jesse, the father of David.

Of the character of Rahab, but little can be said, for very little is known. But we are safe in saying that in spite of her manner of life, which was somewhat excusable in a resident of a city where the moral standard was very low, she was of a highly sensitive nature, peculiarly susceptible to spiritual influences. Her implicit faith in the conquering power of God's people and her confidence in the promise the two spies gave her, of safety in the midst of the destruction of the city, are worthy of our sincerest admiration. With this faith went its appropriate works, and these to-

gether brought about her safety. This faith was great, considering her environments, and the effect it produced was so satisfactory that it was considered worthy of this special reference by Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."

Not less worthy of mention is the depth and sincerity of her repentance and the completeness of her reformation of life. Not every woman, we are safe in saying, would have had the strength of purpose and the endurance to turn so completely from the life she had been leading, and become an honored wife and mother in Israel.

Therefore, although the details of her life and character are meager, enough is given to enable us to judge of her as noble in spirit, steadfast in purpose, spiritual minded, strong in zeal, rich in faith, earnest in repentance, and admirable in domestic virtues.



VI. WOMEN OF THE JUDGES.

1. DEBORAH.

After Joshua had succeeded in conquering a goodly portion of the land of Canaan and dividing it among the tribes, the people were largely left to themselves in governmental affairs, no general leader having been appointed over them. From a careful reading of the history we are led to look on this as unfortunate. It resulted in a condition of division and anarchy. "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

During this period there were many wars, which resulted from attacks being made on a tribe or a small body of the people by some of their surrounding enemies. A leader would be hastily chosen by the people attacked, and he would raise an army of defence, disbanding it and returning to his farm or flocks when the short war was over. The book of Judges is made up of accounts

of these conflicts, and of the attendant disunion and confusion. The lives and experiences of a few women of this period are given, though these accounts are, like the chief history itself, very fragmentary.

Several of the attacks referred to above had been made and repulsed, and the Israelites were gradually encroaching on the domain of the surrounding hostile peoples, when they turned again to evil, and the tribes of the north were given into the hands of Jabin, king of Canaan, who lived in the region west of the Sea of Galilee. In this new and heavy affliction there seemed to be no man of the northern region who possessed sufficient courage and spirit to lead an army against the oppressor. It was under these conditions that the first and only woman judge of Israel arose.

Her name was Deborah. She lived in Mount Ephraim, near the middle of the land of Canaan. Opinion is divided as to her tribe, some supposing her to have belonged to Ephraim, and some to Issachar. The palmtree under which she lived "is mentioned as a well known and solitary landmark," and was called, apparently, "the sanctuary of the palm." She manifested her power in the way of prophetic command; and we do not suppose that she was possessed of quite the same judicial powers as some of the other judges. Her husband's name was Lapidoth.

When Jabin's oppression of the northern tribes became severe, she summoned Barak, "the thun-

derer," and commanded him to go against the tyrant. On Barak's refusing to go unless Deborah went with him, she told him that the honor of defeating and slaying Sisera, Jabin's chief leader, should be given not to him but to a woman.

At her command, Barak placed himself at the head of an army of ten thousand men, and marched northward, accompanied by Deborah. As they approached the army of Sisera, Deborah designated the day in which victory was to be gained, and immediately the attack was made. "And the Lord discomfited Sisera and all his chariots and all his host with the edge of the sword, before Barak: so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet. But Barak pursued after the chariots."

Sisera fled in another direction, and a part of the prophecy of Deborah was fulfilled. He made his way in weakness and weariness to the tent of Heber, the Kenite, who had been one of the allies of Jabin. As Sisera came to the tent door, he was treacherously invited in by Jael, Heber's wife, and protection was promised him. Abandoning all fear, and submitting himself entirely to the protection she had promised, Sisera asked for water and an opportunity to sleep. Jael gave him a kind of buttermilk to drink, and this brought on extreme drowsiness. Telling her to watch the tent door and turn aside all pursuers, he lay down and slept.

Then Jael performed an act which to us appears

not only unwomanly, but treacherous to the last degree; but perhaps the ethical standard then was not so high as now. She took a tent pin and a mallet, and drove the pin through Sisera's temples into the floor of the tent. Then when Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael led him into the tent and showed him what she had done.

We are not so much surprised at this apparently treacherous and cruel deed as we are at Deborah's praise of it in the triumphal song, so full of wild, poetic beauty, recorded in Judges 5. Why she should have mentioned this act in the catalogue together with her own patriotism in arousing Barak to action, and his heroic fight against the oppressor, we do not know. We of a Christian age fail to see in the act anything in which to glory.

The war thus instituted against Jabin continued until his power was entirely destroyed and the Israelites were free for forty years. No further mention is made of Deborah, and her subsequent history is entirely a matter of doubt. Of her character we are able to judge merely from the bare account of her work. We believe her to have been bold, energetic, full of fiery zeal, and anxious to save her people from oppression. Whether she was, as some Bible commentators say, devoid of the womanly qualities of tenderness and sympathy, we are not safe in passing judgment. The times must give rise to their appropriate characters, and the times which produced Deborah were hard indeed. It is sufficient for us to know that she accomplished the labor she was raised up to perform.



2. JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER.

A most dramatic and pathetic episode of Bible history is connected with the time of the Judges, and concerns the great Gileadite captain, Jephthah, and his daughter. It was during one of the periods of oppression referred to in the sketch of Deborah, and the Ammonites were the oppressors. Jephthah, being an illegitimate son of Gilead, was cast out by his father's other sons, and had doubtless fled into the farther wilderness east of Jordan, and become the leader of a band of robbers.

So great was his power and skill as a military leader, however, that when the Ammonite oppression became unendurable, his haughty brothers sent to him and humbly begged him to come to their assistance. It was now his turn to be haughty, and he told them that he would come to their rescue only on condition that after he had defeated the Ammonites, he should be accepted as a leader and "judge" by his brethren. They eagerly accepted this condition, and he returned to them.

As he marched against the Ammonites and joined battle with them, he doubtless lost confi-

dence in his power to defeat them. Therefore after the manner of the heathen leaders, he uttered a rash vow upon the battle field, promising, if the Lord would give him the victory, to sacrifice on the altar the first creature that should come out of his house to greet him on his return. The victory was given him, and the Ammonites were scattered in every direction.

Returning home in triumph, what was his astonishment and dismay at seeing his only daughter run out of his house to greet him with songs and dances of joy! "Alas, my daughter!" said he, "thou has brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

And she said unto him, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth."

I cannot forbear inserting some extracts from the masterful poem of N. P. Willis, describing this scene:

"The mighty Jephthah led his warriors on
Through Mizpeh's streets. His helm was proudly set,
And his stern lip curl'd slightly, as if praise
Were for the hero's scorn. His step was firm,
But free as India's leopard; and his mail,
Whose shekels none in Israel might bear,
Was like a cedar's tassel on his frame.

He led on; but thoughts
Seem'd gathering round which troubled him. The veins
Grew visible upon his swarthy brow,
And his proud lip was pressed as if with pain,

He trod less firmly; and his restless eye
 Glanced forward frequently, as if some ill
 He dared not meet were there.

. A moment more,
 And he had reach'd his home, when lo! there sprang
 One with a bounding footstep and a brow
 Of light, to meet him. Oh, how beautiful!—
 Her dark eye flashing like a sun-lit gem—
 And her luxuriant hair!—'twas like the sweep
 Of a swift wing in visions. He stood still.
 As if the sight had withered him. She threw
 Her arms about his neck—he heeded not.
 She call'd him "Father,"—but he answer'd not.
 She unclasp'd his helm,
 And laid her white hand gently on his brow.
 And the large veins felt stiff and hard, like cords.
 The touch aroused him. He raised up his hands,
 And spoke the name of God in agony.
 She knew that he was stricken then, and rush'd
 Again into his arms; and, with a flood
 Of tears she could not bridle, sobb'd a prayer
 That he would breathe his agony in words.
 He told her—and a momentary flush
 Shot o'er her countenance: and the soul
 Of Jephthah's daughter wakened; and she stood
 Calmly and nobly up, and said 'twas well—
 And she would die.

A pallid man
 Was stretching out his trembling hands to heaven,
 As if he would have prayed, but had no words—
 And she who was to die, the calmest one
 In Israel at that hour, stood up alone,
 And waited for the sun to set. Her face
 Was pale, but very beautiful—her lip
 Had a more delicate outline, and the tint
 Was deeper; but her countenance was like
 The majesty of angels.

The sun set—
 And she was dead—but not by violence."

Before finally submitting to the consequences of her father's rash vow, she asked permission to go with her girl companions into the mountains of the desert wilderness and there bewail her virginity; for it was considered a great calamity for either man or woman, among the Israelites, to die and leave no posterity. Thenceforth it became a custom in Israel for the young maidens to go into the mountains and lament the early fate of Jephthah's daughter, four days in the year.

There has been much speculation indulged in, as to whether Jephthah actually slew his daughter and offered her as a sacrifice, or merely demanded of her perpetual virginity. In support of the first idea, the plain, simple narrative in Judges is referred to. This seems, in the text, to be unmistakable. "He did unto her according to his vow."

But it is so revolting a thought that such a human sacrifice should be made, that some Bible commentators have suggested the other interpretation. The marginal reading would sustain this view. Jephthah's vow is there made to read, "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house shall surely be the Lord's, *or* I will offer it up for a burnt offering." In the last verse of the same chapter the marginal reading is, "The daughters of Israel went yearly to *talk with* the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite, four days in a year."

Those who accept this explanation say that if a dog or a cat had come forth to meet Jephthah, he

could not have offered it, such animals being unclean. Therefore his vow was not strictly binding. Hence since it was directly against the Law of Moses to offer a human sacrifice, his oath would needs be broken here also. Some eminent authorities have supported this view, but I believe the weight of opinion is in favor of the other. It must be remembered that in the period of the Judges the operation of the laws was largely suspended, and Jephthah could doubtless do as he pleased. He had probably been away from Israelitish influence and under the influence of the heathen for so many years, that the Law of Moses was a dead letter to him, and he was attracted by the pagan custom of sacrificing, on great occasions, princes and princesses. Some go so far as to contend that Jephthah expected his daughter to meet him; that indeed he intended to vow her to the Lord as a burnt offering, as his most precious earthly possession.

Again it is urged that no such thing was ever known among the ancient Israelites as voluntarily giving one's self up to perpetual virginity, while human sacrifices did occur among them. These arguments are strong, and appeal to the reason, but our feelings revolt against the thought of her being thus ruthlessly put to death. Therefore many people decide through their feelings, against the conclusion which seems to be forced upon the reason, and thus each one is left to settle the matter for himself.

Whichever is the true solution, we cannot help

admiring the heroic resignation displayed by this girl, who may justly lay claim to our consideration as one of the heroines of Israel. Quoting from Geikie: "The bearing of father and daughter in so sad a calamity is equally striking. He is crushed by its greatness; but she rises with a noble grandeur of soul above her own sorrow, and, in her darkened conceptions of God, almost glories that he has granted the victory even at the price of her own sacrifice. She only asks that she be left for two months to bewail her early unmarried death—so sad to Hebrew women—in the lonely depths of the mountains. Then comes the last, awful scene: 'He did with her according to his vow.' No wonder that such a story should linger in the popular memory, and that, for generations after, the maidens of the land, in sympathy with such a victim of mistaken devotion—the first and last human sacrifice offered by well-meaning ignorance to Jehovah—should bewail her fate, and praise her grand resignation to it, on the hills which had witnessed her last days."

One writer thus refers to this sad death, and the lesson it teaches: "The memories called up by her death, the beautiful virtues that shine forth in that young life, are of priceless worth to the sons and daughters of every land. To us, here in this new world, where liberty needs to be guarded against its own excesses, amid all the blessings it confers, it is most important to recall this example of a filial love and obedience without compare, of a

devotion to country that without a murmur yielded life in its first blossom, and of a sublime reverence for promises plighted to God. It is in the cherishing of such ideals, that humanity purifies and renovates its beliefs and affections."



3. DELILAH.

If any of my readers desire to get an eminent writer's estimate of the strong and crafty woman who wrought such havoc with the mighty Samson, I would refer them to the classic drama, "Samson Agonistes," by Milton. There her character is shown up in all its picturesque deceit and treachery.

Delilah was doubtless a Philistine courtesan of great personal beauty, and possessed, in a high degree, of the art of fascinating men. She was willing to use this power in behalf of the Philistines, to accomplish the overthrow of Samson, the Danite judge.

The tribe of Dan was situated in the coasts of Philistia, to the westward of most of the other tribes. Here it was particularly exposed to the danger of being overthrown by its enemies and brought into bondage. So great was this danger, indeed, that before the close of the period of the Judges, almost the entire tribe moved away from the Philistine plain, to the region near the Waters of Merom, north of the Sea of Galilee.

It was during one of these periods of oppres-

sion that Samson came into prominence as a deliverer. He was a Nazarite, from the Hebrew word, *Nazar*, meaning "to separate." His title betokened the fact that by a vow he had separated himself from the rest of the people, with reference to manner of life, food, etc. He was thenceforth to abstain from strong drink in every form, to avoid becoming unclean through certain contaminations, and most carefully to avoid the cutting of hair or beard. Such was Samson—made so by his parents' vow before his birth.

Before the appearance of his greatest temptress, Delilah, he had already passed through several exciting and dangerous experiences on account of his great fondness for Philistine women, "the strong man's weakness." His marriage to a woman of that nation had proved very disastrous; and his adventure on the occasion of his visit to the harlot of Gaza, when it became necessary for him to carry away the gates of the city, should have proved sufficient warning to him.

But a man is often either unable or unwilling to profit even by his own experiences, especially where "lovely woman" is concerned. So it proved in Samson's case. Delilah, "the woman in the valley of Sorek," next attracted Samson by her charms. Her manner of life gave her great power of intrigue, and enabled her to become the willing tool of the Philistine lords in their efforts to avenge on Samson the death of so many of their people. While professing the greatest love for him, she

endeavored by every possible art to discover the secret of his great strength, and betray him into the hands of the Philistines.

That Samson was somewhat of a humorist, seems to be proved by the tricks he played on Delilah before he gave her the secret of his strength. The outcome proved, however, that she was in earnest, and determined fully to merit the money with which the Philistine lords had bribed her. As he consorted with her day after day, she continued to beg and plead that he give to her the key to his superhuman strength. But although he had departed far from the law of morality, he still remained true to his Nazarite vow, and upon that his physical strength depended. This is but one of many illustrations of the fact that spiritual and moral weakness and great physical strength often go together. Delilah, artful and unscrupulous, was willing to take advantage of these two characteristics, to mould the mighty Samson to her will.

But he did not dare betray the important secret at first. Instead, he trifled with her, doubtless laughing at her and the discomfited Philistines after each unsuccessful attempt to bind him. He was first bound with green withes, which had never been dried, but when the Philistines came upon him, the willow branches snapped asunder like burnt tow. New rope was next tried, but it proved equally vain, breaking from his arms like a thread. The next attempt came dangerously

near the important secret. The seven locks of his hair were woven into the web, or warp, on the loom, and fastened securely with the pin. But he awoke from his sleep, and walked away with web, pin, and beam.

Then came the supreme test. Half upbraiding and half pleading, "she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death." One of the finest passages in music is the theme of Saint Saens' great oratorio, where this pleading is expressed in a magnificent and pathetic tone-picture. At length her importunities won, and "he told her all his heart." His strength was in his hair. "If I be shaven," said he, "then my strength will go from me, and I shall be like any other man."

Knowing that he had given her the important information at last, Delilah summoned the Philistines and arranged to betray Samson into their hands. She had a man shave off the seven locks of hair, and then the Philistines rushed on him. Samson had committed a sin in betraying his vow, which could not be condoned. His strength deserted him, and he fell into the hands of his enemies. They blinded him, and put him in prison at Gaza.

Here the history of Delilah closes, so far as the Bible is concerned. After receiving Samson's blood-money she dropped out of sight. Nor does Jewish tradition throw any light on her subsequent history. A fanciful, but life-like and con-

sistent picture is drawn in Milton's "Samson Agonistes," already referred to, where she is represented as coming to the blind and captive hero, and pleading to be taken back into his affection. The following quotations show the trend of this poetic conversation.

Delilah—

. "Conjugal affection,
 Prevailing over fear and timorous doubt,
 Hath led me on, desirous to behold
 Once more thy face, and know of thy estate,
 If aught in my ability may serve
 To lighten what thou sufferest."

Samson—

"Out, out hyena! these are thy wonted arts,
 And arts of every woman false like thee,
 To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray,
 Then as repentant to submit, beseech,
 And reconciliation move with feigned remorse,
 Confess, and promise wonders in her change."

.

Delilah—

. "I was assured by those
 Who tempted me, that nothing was designed
 Against thee but safe custody, and hold:
 That made for me; I knew that liberty
 Would draw thee forth to perilous enterprises,
 While I at home sat full of cares and fears,
 Wailing thy absence in my widowed bed.
 Here I should still enjoy thee, day and night,
 Mine and love's prisoner, not the Philistines'."

.

Samson—

"How cunningly the sorceress displays
 Her own transgressions, to upbraid me mine!"

Delilah—

“I to the lords will intercede, not doubting
Their favorable ear, that I may fetch thee
From forth this loathsome prison-house to abide
With me, where my redoubled love and care,
With nursing diligence, to me glad office,
May ever tend about thee to old age.”

Samson—

“This jail I count the house of liberty
To thine, whose doors my feet shall never enter.”

Delilah—

“Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand.”

Samson—

“Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake
My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint.”

Failing to beguile him with her flatteries and entreaties, she leaves him with a proud, contemptuous sneer, and boasts of the honors she will enjoy among her countrymen, as the conqueror of the mighty Samson. Her closing words:

“I shall be named among the famousest
Of women, sung at solemn festivals,
Living and dead recorded, who, to save
Her country from a fierce destroyer, chose
Above the faith of wedlock bands; my tomb
With odors visited, and annual flowers;
Not less renowned than in Mount Ephraim
Jael, who with inhospitable guile
Smote Sisera sleeping, through the temples nailed.
Nor shall I count it heinous to enjoy
The public marks of honor and reward
Conferred upon me, for the piety
Which to my country I was judged to have shown,
At this, whoever envies or repines:
I leave him to his lot, and like my own,”

This portraiture by Milton agrees with the estimate already made of Delilah, as an unscrupulous, treacherous, immoral woman, capable of perpetrating any villany, making any false pretense, and enjoying any reward of treachery—one of the few evil women of the Bible.



VII. NAOMI, RUTH, AND ORPAH.

Strictly speaking, the history of these women belongs to the period of the Judges; but as the beautiful story of the three really introduces the more prosperous period of the Kings, it is given separately.

During the lawless era of which mention has been made, a grievous famine occurred in the land of Judah. To escape this famine, a man by the name of Elimelech, with his wife, Naomi, and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, went into the land of Moab, in the region of the Dead Sea. In course of time Elimelech died; and soon thereafter Mahlon and Chilion married two Moabite women, the first, Ruth, the second, Orpah. Then these two men died, and the three women were left desolate.

Hearing that the famine in Judah was ended, Naomi yearned for her country and people, and determined to return thither. Accompanied by her two widowed daughters-in-law, she set out upon her journey. But remembering, no doubt, how difficult it would be for two Moabite women, and widows at that, to procure husbands among the Jews, unless there were brothers of their de-

ceased husbands to marry them, Naomi told them to return to their own people, and there marry. It will be remembered that according to the Levirate Law it was expected that a widow would be married by her deceased husband's brother, with the understanding that all children born of the union should belong to the first husband. Naomi had no other sons (Ruth 1: 11-13), and she knew it would be unlikely that any other relative would marry the widows, they being of another people. Hence her anxiety that they should return to their own land.

Orpah felt the force of the argument, and, weeping, kissed her mother-in-law and went back. Not so Ruth. She clung to Naomi with the devotion born of sincere affection, and uttered the words which for beauty of expression and depth of sentiment are unexcelled in the language: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God;

"Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

Touched to the heart by this beautiful devotion, Naomi ceased soliciting Ruth to return to Moab, and the two women went on their way to Bethlehem. "But in the young woman before us, what is the deep and mysterious love that binds her soul to that of her husband's mother? He is

cold in the grave. She is without a roof above her,—a poor, aged waif, borne from her famine-stricken country by the wave of ill-fortune, and stranded, all helpless and forlorn, on this distant shore. Every affection or hope that holds the human heart fast to home and kindred and country, should keep Ruth in the land of Moab: in Israel she will be an alien, if not in religion, at least in blood; for irreconcilable enmities and antipathies must ever prevent the race of Moab and Ammon from being looked upon with any other feeling than aversion or horror in the land of Israel. All this Ruth knows, and still she hesitates not. She is by the side of her mother-in-law, her true and only parent henceforth." Their arrival at Bethlehem created a great commotion, as Naomi was of the higher class of people—a woman of influence. But there is something very pathetic in her answer to their surprised exclamation, "Is this Naomi?" Said she, "Call me not Naomi [pleasant]; call me Mara [bitter]: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

Naomi and Ruth reached Bethlehem at the time of barley harvest; and the younger woman went out to glean in the field. The laws of the Israelites in reference to gleaning were very humane. "When ye reap the harvest of your land thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest; thou shalt

leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger. . . . When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow."

The field in which Ruth gleaned belonged to Boaz, a near relative of her deceased husband. As he came into the field he asked the reapers who she was. Upon being informed, he went to her and bade her welcome, promising her protection against insults at the hands of the young men. He went so far as to do much more than fulfil the law respecting gleaning. He even instructed his harvesters to allow her to glean among the sheaves, and to let fall some handfuls in her way. Moreover, he invited her to partake of food with him and his servants at the noon-tide. From all of which we are led to think that Boaz had fallen an instant victim to her charms.

When Ruth reported to her mother-in-law the result of the first day's gleaning, Naomi was greatly pleased. Then she began to exercise her skill as a match-maker; and to me she appears to have possessed a great deal of ability in that direction. She told Ruth that Boaz was a near relative, and advised her to continue gleaning in his field and enjoying his assistance and protection. The advice was followed, and thus the barley and wheat harvest passed.

Naomi saw that more direct measures must be taken to secure the active favor of Boaz toward

Ruth; and she seemed willing to go to any reasonable length to gain that favor. Her next expedient seemed a rather hazardous one, but the outcome was as she desired it to be. She told Ruth to go at night to the threshing-floor, where Boaz slept, doubtless to protect his newly-gathered harvest from the robbers who infested the land in those violent times. She was to watch him as he ate and drank; and to mark the place where he lay down to sleep. When he had fallen asleep she crept to his rude couch and lay at his feet, using as a covering the mantle which he had thrown over himself. At midnight he discerned that someone was lying there, and asked who it was. Her answer implied a request that he act the part of a kinsman to her, by redeeming her husband's land, and marrying her. This he promised to do, if another kinsman, nearer than he, failed to take advantage of the opportunity.

At daybreak he filled her vail, or apron, with barley, and bade her depart; giving her the assurance that the matter would be settled before the close of the day. Naomi was highly delighted at the report Ruth brought to her. She rightly judged that Boaz would be impatient to have the affair attended to at once. "Sit still, my daughter," said she, "until thou know how the matter will fall; for the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day."

The remainder of the story gives us the most striking illustration of the working of the Levirate

Law to be found in Scripture. That morning Boaz took his station at the gate of the city, the place of tribunal where all such matters were settled. When the near kinsman of Ruth came by, Boaz called to him, and asked him to sit down. Ten men of the elders of the city sat down with Boaz and his companion, and the case went to trial. Boaz related the case to the kinsman, stating that a parcel of land, which had belonged to Elimelech, was about to be sold by Naomi. He stated, further, that the kinsman had the first chance of redeeming this land. The man said he would take advantage of the opportunity and purchase the land. But Boaz said, "What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance."

This seems to have been an incumbrance on which the kinsman had not counted, and which he did not care to assume. Said he, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance; redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it." If the law had been strictly carried out, Ruth would have had the privilege of loosing the kinsman's shoe from his foot, spitting in his face, and proclaiming him throughout Israel as a delinquent who had failed in his duty; and henceforth he would have been known as "the man that had his shoe loosed." But we rather think that Ruth and Naomi were too well pleased at the pros-

pect of Ruth's marriage to Boaz, to feel any chagrin at this development.

Therefore, the kinsman drew off his own shoe and handed it to Boaz in token that he had transferred all rights to him. Boaz then spoke to the ten elders, calling them to witness that the nearer relative had waived his rights in this matter, and that he (Boaz) had purchased the inheritance, and was now entitled and obligated to make Ruth his wife. And they all said, "We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: and let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman."

But it should be observed here that strictly speaking, the children born of this marriage would not belong to Boaz, but to Mahlon. The Levirate Law distinctly provided that the inheritance should be redeemed and children reared to the name of the dead. Such was the law by which the inheritance and the posterity of a dead man were kept intact.

The "levir," or brother-in-law, of the widow, or in the absence of such a one, the nearest relative was expected, under pain of infamy, to sacrifice his own interest and feelings to the good of his deceased tribesman. In this case, the task was rendered all the more difficult by the fact that the woman, Ruth, was of another people. Hence we

are obliged to think that if it had not been for the skilful match-making of Naomi and the personal charms of Ruth, the story might not have had so happy a termination.

But it is in relation to her place in the genealogy of the kings of Judah and of Christ that we are chiefly interested in Ruth. Both her husbands, Mahlon and Boaz, were of the line of Judah, concerning whom Israel had said, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, till Shiloh come." If even this be interpreted to mean no more than that the royal line can be traced through Judah to Shiloh (Christ) without a break, and that, therefore, even in a human sense, Jesus was by right of birth, king of the Jews, our interest in Ruth is not at all diminished. Her son, Obed, became the father of Jesse, whose son, David, established the royal line of Judah. Through this royal family, Matthew traces the genealogy of Christ; sometimes, it is true, by adoption, sometimes by birth, but never in a doubtful sense. Hence to the Jew, the personality and the history of Ruth are interesting, because of the kings that descended from her; to Christians she is still more of interest, for the Christ was her descendant.

I cannot forbear referring, at this point, to the fact that in many places the genealogy of the kings of Judah, and that of Jesus, was kept alive by the infusion of non-Israelitish blood, and by means which, if strictly judged, would appear

little doubtful to us. The case of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar, is a striking illustration. At that time, on account of gross wickedness, the line of Judah was almost extinct. One after another of his sons had been smitten of God and had died; until, finally, no married son was left to perpetuate the tribe. Then it was that Tamar, finding herself a neglected widow, resorted to the revolting stratagem so graphically recorded in Genesis 38, involving Judah in her guilt. That the Lord may and sometimes will turn even the most evil and disgraceful acts to His own glory and the good of the world, is strikingly illustrated in the incident referred to. The twins that were born to Tamar became the heads of the two branches of the house of Judah, Pharez being one of the ancestors of Christ.

Another instance of the use of strange means to an end, is found in the case of Rahab; where a woman of open and notorious evil character becomes the wife of Salmon, and the mother of the man Boaz, whose life, in connection with Ruth's, has been treated. The case of Ruth also introduces a foreign element into the genealogy, but in this instance there is not even a suspicion of evil in conduct or character. The case of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, to be detailed at a later time, is a similar one. Yet it should be observed that in these cases, it is only the woman who belongs to a foreign race. The man is always of the tribe of Judah, and heir to the blessings

pronounced on the founder of that tribe. This is of importance when we consider that among the Jews all rights, blessings, privileges, powers, and inheritances pass through male lineage. But honorable mention is made of the foreign women who were instrumental in keeping alive the kingly line, when it seemed almost in danger of becoming extinct. For we suppose that Boaz was very much older than Ruth; and perhaps he was proof against the charms of the women of his own tribe, whom he had known since their childhood. Hence the opportune coming of the beautiful Moabitish widow afforded the means of keeping intact this decaying branch of the house of Judah.

Of the subsequent life of Ruth we know nothing, not even from tradition. She lives, as every true woman can best live, in her posterity, and in the fame they have acquired, and the good they have done in the world. No greater honor can be conceived than to be specially chosen, by the power of prophecy, to become the ancestress of Messiah. For, after all, it matters little who do the great and good deeds of the world, whether we or our children. And the woman who goes on from day to day, fulfilling her mission as a wife and mother, building nobly and well the characters of her children, will rise to higher honor and enjoy a greater fame through them than she can hope to attain to in any other field of effort. A mother's influence increases in geometric progression, and through the good deeds of her noble sons, it may

extend into all the world, though she herself be known, during her lifetime, only in a little village such as Bethlehem. Nay, as in the case of Ruth, her labors may be multiplied and magnified by her posterity, so as to extend throughout and permeate time, eternity, and all the providences of God concerning His children.

Perhaps this did not occur to the mind of Ruth, when she first took the infant Obed in her arms, or ministered to his childish needs. Nor does it occur to many of our present-day mothers, as in anxiety, labor, pain, and toil, they give noble men and women to the world, and thus enrich it beyond measure. Yet not one of them knows but her son, either in his own person, or in his posterity, will become one of the greatest actors in the drama of life. And in this is seen the great law of compensation: that years of toil and self-sacrifice, such as fall to the lot of mothers, will not—*can not*—go unrewarded.

As to the characters of Naomi and Ruth, little need be said but to tell their story. Naomi's devotion to her husband and tribe, which led her to work incessantly for the redemption of his inheritance and the perpetuation of his family, is worthy of all praise. At the same time her patience under trial and difficulty attracts our sincere admiration. Ruth's strong characteristics were her love for Naomi and obedience to her and to tribal law. It required just these elements, at just this time, to guard against threatened disaster to Judah's line,

and to give to the world the inspiration to deeds of devotion, and the warmth of poetic sentiment which spring from the beautiful story of Ruth.

As to Orpah, we can merely say that she was not Ruth—did not act the part that Ruth acted—for there was need of but one Ruth. It is the old question of choice between walking by sight and walking by faith. To Orpah, who seemed to be lacking in the warm affection for Naomi which characterized Ruth, there was no great pleasure in the prospect of spending the remainder of her life as a widow in a strange land. Better the more favorable prospect of marriage afforded by a residence among her own people. Therefore, walking by sight rather than faith, seeing the immediate prospect, not the remote, she turned back, and was known no more in history. Ruth, on the other hand, walked by pure affection, which is one of the strongest elements of faith, and waiting for the more remote prospect, made herself immortal through her posterity.

I do not like to introduce here the old "*hæc fabula docet*," preferring that my readers draw from the story the lesson which can be fitted to the various events and duties of their own lives.

VIII. HANNAH AND PENINNAH.

Our attention is now turned to the latter part of the period of the Judges. The confusion and disorder characteristic of that time, had not subsided. True, at certain places efforts had been made to bring order out of disorder, and system out of chaos, but these attempts were only partially successful, and affected only the immediate vicinity. One of these places, and perhaps the most important one, was Shiloh, "peace," the place where the sanctuary was set up. The one who ruled here in mingled religious and secular authority, was the High Priest, Eli. A good man, and thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his work, he was yet, we think, lacking in that kindness and personal magnetism which go so far toward making the successful and inspiring leader. Strict almost to harshness, and inclined to censure without due deliberation, his course tended to drive his people from him; and even his own sons turned to wicked ways. Yet he was not inclined to be even appropriately strict with them, and the people complained at the apparent favoritism. They were, therefore, almost ready for revolt against his house.

It was at this precarious time that a man of the tribe of Levi, named Elkanah, lived in Mount Ephraim with his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was suffering under the affliction of childlessness, but Peninnah had children. Hannah's misfortune was a source of great grief to her, and we gather from the reading that Peninnah added to this grief by her taunts.

Therefore, the almost constant theme of Hannah's prayers to God, was that she might be blessed with a son. In weeping and in fasting this petition was offered up, until her husband gently rebuked her with the words, "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?"

On one occasion, while Hannah was at the sanctuary at Shiloh, she stood before the Lord and prayed to him in bitterness of soul, weeping sore. With her prayer she offered a vow, that if the Lord would grant her a son, she would make of him a Nazarite, sanctifying him to Jehovah from his birth, and giving him to the service of the sanctuary from the time of his weaning. As Eli saw her standing in the temple, weeping and moving her lips though no sound issued from them, he thought she was one of the numerous women who at that time, even in the sanctuary of God, drank to excess the wine of the peace-offering, and in a maudlin condition, made even the doorway of the tabernacle a place of disgraceful sensuality. Indeed, Eli's own sons had been guilty of participat-

ing in these orgies, bringing disrepute and infamy upon the priestly office. It is no wonder, then, that he spoke sharply to her, out of his indignation: "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee."

But Hannah most humbly protested that she was not one of the daughters of Belial who were wont to disgrace God's sanctuary, but a sorrowful woman speaking out of the abundance of her grief and complaint. Then by way of making reparation for his hasty judgment, and in consideration of her earnest devotion, Eli said to her, "Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him." Thus reassured by the inspired, authoritative promise of the priest of God, Hannah went with joy to her own home.

The Lord gave her the desire of her heart, and the son that was born to her was named Samuel, the word meaning, "asked of God." When Samuel was weaned, which event in oriental countries usually took place when the child was two years old, his mother took him to Eli at Shiloh, and gave him over to the service of the sanctuary.

It is interesting and pathetic to note the true inward meaning of the words she used in presenting the child to Eli, the representative of God. She said in effect, "Here is the child the Lord gave me in response to my petition. Since I have obtained him from the Lord through prayer, I now return him to the Lord, to whom he belongs." It was enough for her that she had been the blessed

instrument in bringing such a soul into the world. And as she was childless before his birth, so was she willing to be, in effect, childless afterward if necessary, since the Lord had granted her earnest prayer.

Then flowed from her lips a mingled prayer and song of praise, full of triumph and gratitude, and imbued with the spirit of poetry. This song, which is found in the second chapter of first Samuel, will repay a careful reading by one who is blest with the power of appreciating sublime poetry.

But the great sacrifice she had made in giving her only son to God's service, and freely exiling herself from him, was accepted of the Lord, and appropriately rewarded. There were given to her other children, three sons and two daughters. For the rest of her life she lived in her children, and especially in her great son Samuel; no further mention of her life or any of its incidents, is made in the Bible. But of her life our best judgment is made by a study of the life and character of her oldest son; and judged from that standard, she must pass for almost a perfect woman. She was patient, though deeply sorrowful, under the heaviest affliction that can befall a Hebrew woman, even though Peninnah ungenerously and ungratefully taunted her with her childlessness. She knew that any gift of children that she might enjoy, must come as a special favor from God, and that rebelling against any of His providences and complaining hopelessly of His seeming injustice, would not

bring to her that favor. Therefore she sought it by the only consistent means—earnest prayer. Thus her conquest over the evils which beset her became complete, and carried with it the mercy and blessings of God.

We cannot help contrasting this sublime faith and patience with the seeming selfishness and spitefulness of Peninnah. She had doubtless been given by Hannah to Elkanah partly because of Hannah's barrenness; and thus the great boon of wifehood and motherhood had been bestowed upon her. Yet, instead of being duly grateful for this distinction, she was, we have every reason to believe, the "adversary" who, by her taunts and insinuations, rendered the affliction of Hannah harder to bear. May it not be that this difference of disposition explains in part why Hannah, and not Peninnah, is rendered immortal by the goodness and greatness of her son? At any rate, we are safe in saying that she who would thus live in her children's fame has the power, to a great extent, of accomplishing this by her early influence over them.

IX. THREE WIVES OF DAVID.

It has already been stated that the lives of Ruth and Hannah are closely associated with the period of transition from the Judges to the Kings of Israel. We are interested in the first of these women, chiefly because her descendant, David, was one of the greatest of the kings; in the second because her son, Samuel, was mainly instrumental in bringing about the monarchy. Unfortunately, we are not made acquainted with the wife of the great prophet Samuel; but some of the wives of David are brought to our particular attention, and form some of the most striking examples of the women of the early period of the monarchy. Three of these, Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba, will be briefly considered here.

David had performed his great labor of slaying Goliath, the Philistine giant, and had done such other deeds of valor as made him the popular hero. Praise was lavished upon him by woman singers, who lauded him far above Saul, the king. Their song with its refrain, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David hath slain his ten thousands," reflected the universal, popular esti-

mate of the handsome young warrior, and tended to arouse the latent envy and jealousy of the king.

At first Saul was able to hide this jealousy under a fair exterior, and he promoted David to positions of prominence as chief captain and musician to the king; but we are forced to think that this was done in order that he might the better destroy him. Jealousy is one of the strongest indications of insanity, and it is usually coupled with a sagacious cunning which is used to bring about the ruin of the unsuspecting rival. In Saul's case both of these traits were very prominent; and the openhearted, frank, generous David would have been put at a great disadvantage if it had not been for the love felt for him by two of Saul's children, Michal and Jonathan. It is the devotion of the first of these that is to be spoken of here.

Michal was a younger daughter of Saul. Her elder sister's name was Merab. Knowing the honor that attached to the marriage of a young man to a king's daughter, Saul determined to use these two girls as snares to entrap David, and bring about revenge for his increasing popularity. First, he proposed a marriage with Merab, his eldest daughter. David seemed willing; but when, apparently, all arrangements had been made, Saul gave her to another man. We do not know his object in this, unless it was to arouse David to resentment, and possibly to rebellion, and thus gain an excuse for bringing about his destruction. But David was either too wise or too passive to

take serious offense at the slight thus perpetrated upon him. Then Saul offered to make reparation by giving to David his younger daughter, Michal, intending to use her as a means of ensnaring his rival. But in the simple words of the record, "Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David," and instead of consenting to his betrayal into the hands of her father, she shielded him on every possible occasion.

Saul demanded that David furnish, as a fitting dowry for his wife, evidence that he and his companions had slain one hundred Philistines. His thought and hope was that David would be killed in the attempt. But David went out with his men and slew two hundred. Nothing could now stand in the way of the consummation of the marriage; but Saul knew now that instead of being a snare to David, Michal would be his devoted friend and protector.

Now commences the pathetic story of Michal's married life, involving devotion, trial, separation, and ultimate childlessness, and showing how the daughter and the wife of two rivals is called upon to suffer for the quarrel between them. Michal was soon asked to choose which of the two she would favor in the conflict. Saul had made a direct attempt on the life of David, who fled to his home and placed himself under the protection of his wife. Immediately the servants of Saul came to Michal and demanded that David be delivered up. Anticipating such a request, Michal had

let David down from a window, and placed an image in his bed, sending word to Saul that her husband was sick. The servants were sent back with orders to bring David up in his bed that Saul might slay him. Coming to the bed they found only an image. In his anger Saul upbraided Michal, but she justified her course, even fabricating the story that David had sought to kill her.

This was the real commencement of that romantic and important period of David's life known as his outlawry. During this time Michal suffered much. When her husband had been away a short time, her father, exercising, we suppose, an unjust authority, gave her as a wife to a man named Phalti, or Phaltiel.

While David was in the wilderness, fleeing from Saul, he married two other wives, Ahinoam and Abigail. The circumstances of his marriage to the second of these, throw considerable light on David's outlawry, revealing to us its true nature. He was at the head of a band of men who had fled from the law, or from debts, and joined him in his wandering life. They were men who had nothing to lose and everything to gain: and doubtless they would have willingly enriched themselves at the expense of the cattle- and sheep-owners of the south country, where they sojourned, if it had not been for David's restraining hand. But he was a strong, conscientious leader, and kept them in an entirely different line of employment. Surrounding the inhabitants of the south country, were wild, lawless tribes,

who lived by thefts from the thrifty shepherds and stockmen of that region; David had his men turn their attention to protecting these people against such thieves; and so successfully was this done, that he could justly boast of having been "as a wall" to their property.

One of these sheep owners, Nabal, had a wife named Abigail. He was of a foolish, surly, disagreeable nature, while she was frank, open-hearted, and very beautiful. It was shearing-time, and Nabal was in the height of his prosperity. But with him prosperity was a cause of pride, not of gratitude. David sent some of his men to Nabal, with a request that he impart some of his substance to their support, in return for the great service they had rendered him. But Nabal answered them churlishly. "Who is David?" said he, "and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?"

This answer was a double insult. In the first place, it implied that the services David had rendered in protecting Nabal's herds, were valueless; and that therefore the demand was a species of attempted robbery. Secondly, there was an indefinite hint that David had fled in a lawless, cowardly manner from his master Saul. The two taunts were unendurable to the future king of Israel. In

anger, he commanded his men to gird on their swords, determined to lead them to the utter destruction of Nabal and his household.

But one of Nabal's men had told Abigail, the wife of Nabal, of his answer to David, and its probable result. Alarmed, not, we suppose, so much by Nabal's danger, as by the danger to his household and his property, she hastened to avert the calamity. She did not take her husband into her confidence, but proceeded of her own will. She loaded some beasts with provisions and other presents, and sent them on by servants, following behind them to visit David. She came to him just as he was about to start on his expedition against her husband. Falling before him on her face, she addressed him in a wise, conciliating, diplomatic speech, the superior of which is not found in the Bible. She adroitly took it upon herself to suffer for Nabal's meanness, for, said she, "As his name is, so is he; Nabal (fool) is his name, and folly is with him." Therefore, as a fool he was not to be held responsible for the insult given to David. She must answer for it, but as she did not know of the request, she should not suffer for its refusal. If David would be merciful this once, the Lord would reward him by establishing his house securely and destroying his enemies.

It was a diplomatic speech, worthy of a profound pleader. Touched by it, no less than by the beauty of the woman; and filled, no doubt, with pity at the thought that such intellect was "un-

equally yoked together'' with ignorant boorishness, David accepted her gifts and withdrew from his intended expedition against Nabal's household.

Returning home, Abigail found her husband drunk with his men, the occasion being a feast in honor of the shearing. Her disgust and loathing of him must have been greatly increased by seeing him in this maudlin condition; and I will not deny that she probably contrasted him in her mind with the young, bright, handsome man she had just been interviewing. At any rate when the morning came and Nabal was sufficiently sober to understand, Abigail told him all about the affair. Dull as he was, he must have seen clearly that all was lost to him—his own self-respect, his enjoyment of life, the love and esteem of his wife. "His heart died within him, and he became as a stone." Ten days afterward he died. In this David saw that the Lord had taken the vengeance against Nabal into His own hands, and saved him from destroying Nabal's house.

But another meaning appeared to him also. He saw the release of Abigail from an alliance which was unbearable to her. He also saw the opportunity of satisfying the affection and admiration for her which had sprung up in his own heart. He immediately sent his servants to her with a proposal of marriage. There was no hesitancy on her part. She followed David's servants to him and became his wife.

That the life of outlawry and wandering to

which the wives of David were subjected, was full of danger, is proved by the incident of the attack by the Amalekites on David's city, Ziklag, and the carrying away of Ahinoam and Abigail. This happened during David's absence. On his return, he pursued the robbers, surprised them in their drunken enjoyment of the spoil, defeated and slew them, and brought his wives and the wives of his men home again. These wives remained true to him during the remainder of his outlawry, and so far as we know, neither of them was the source of any injury to him, either directly or indirectly.

But more prosperous times soon came to him, and it was in the midst of his prosperity that the great evils of his life were brought upon him. When Saul was slain, David became king, and subdued all rivals. As the last of these was quelled, and Abner was asking for a league with David, the king demanded as a condition of forming the league that Abner bring to him Michal, Saul's daughter, and the wife of his youth. The feelings of her present husband were not considered. Abner roughly demanded that she follow him to David. She obeyed, whether willingly or not we do not know. But Phalti followed her, weeping and crying after her, until Abner roughly accosted him with, "Go, return!" He returned, and Michal again became David's wife. The result was not happy. An estrangement occurred between David and Michal, which needed only an occasion to become a separation. The occasion

arose when David brought the ark from Kirjath Jearim to Jerusalem. In his great joy, he followed in the procession, divested of his kingly robes, and leaping and dancing before the people. Michal looked at him through a window, and was filled with disgust and loathing. When, therefore, he entered his house, she met him with words of contemptuous reproof. David took her remark as ridicule of his praise and 'thanksgiving to Jehovah, and bitterly resented it. He uttered words of scathing rebuke, and left her. She became an involuntary widow for the rest of her life. The words of the Bible are as pathetic as brief: "Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child until the day of her death." Thus Michal is dismissed from the Bible record.

But David's real troubles and disasters now crowded upon him. He had made himself comparatively secure from his enemies, so that he considered himself safe in remaining at home while his captains fought his battles abroad. It was this enforced, unnatural idleness that brought about the commencement of his calamities. Lounging on the roof of his palace one evening, he saw the beautiful Bathsheba, wife of one of his bravest soldiers, Uriah the Hittite. Moved by what appears to us to be an insane passion which recked not of consequences, he sent for her, and the great sin of his life was committed. Then followed the series of prevarications and crimes by which he sought to hide his offense: his sending for Uriah;

the brave soldier's refusal, whether sober or drunk, to indulge in the pleasures and comforts of home while his comrades slept in the field; David's sending him back with his own death warrant—an order to Joab to set Uriah in the front of the battle, and leave him to his fate. Thus does one crime breed its appropriate litter.

After a brief sham mourning for her dead husband, Bathsheba became the wife of David in time to legitimatize her child. "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Nathan's parable of the "one little ewe lamb," by which he led David to pass sentence upon himself, is familiar to all readers of the Bible. That his own sentence, death, was not executed upon him, is due to the fact of his previous righteousness, and to God's leniency. In one way, however, it was not leniency, for David had to suffer through his children.

Bathsheba's child died according to the word of the Prophet Nathan, in spite of David's efforts to prevent the sad occurrence. As a pledge, however, that God had not entirely departed from them, David and Bathsheba had another son, whom they named Solomon, while the Lord through his prophet named him Jedidiah, "the beloved of Jehovah." He was destined to be David's successor, the great, wise king, and an ancestor of the Christ.

Bathsheba looked most jealously after the interests of this son. Just before his father's death, the throne was in danger of being seized by Adoni-

jah, another of David's sons, but the watchfulness and zeal of Bathsheba saved the crown to Solomon. At David's death, Solomon was formally proclaimed king, and Bathsheba's ambition was satisfied.

One other attempt, indirectly made, to take the throne from Solomon, is closely connected with the life of Bathsheba. David, just before his death, had taken a young concubine, named Abishag. Adonijah asked Bathsheba to intercede with King Solomon, to give Abishag to him (Adonijah) as a wife. She did this, we presume, in all innocence, not knowing or not remembering that in oriental countries the marrying of a dead king's concubine was equivalent to usurping the throne. Solomon remembered it, however, and at once gave orders that Adonijah be put to death as a usurper. Therefore, as the first mention of Bathsheba in the Bible is connected with a grievous sin, so the last is involved in violence. Her life did not make for peace and morality. And how much of the sorrow and violence of the latter years of David's life was due to her willing complicity in his sin, will probably never be known. But these calamities can be directly or indirectly traced to this one sin: the death of David's child; the crime of Amnon against Tamar; the revenge and flight of Absalom; his subsequent rebellion and grossness; the flight of David from his wrath; the civil war, resulting in Absalom's death; and the attempted usurpation of Solomon's kingdom by his

brother Adonijah. Truly, the wages of sin is death.

A brief summary of the varying fortunes and characters of these three women remains to be given. Michal, the wife of David's youth, was his by the strongest and holiest tie—pure, disinterested love. Her changing fortunes and his long absence probably produced their effect in weakening this tie, and the cruel wrong inflicted on her husband Phalti did not tend to strengthen it. Therefore we are not surprised that the bond was finally broken, and in the time of his greatest prosperity he was separated from her who had been his truest friend in his adversity. But there is one thing of which this gives proof—her attachment to him was for love alone, and not for self-interest. Her heart, not her ambition, was her guide to marriage.

It may be well to say here that some writers lay the blame for Michal's marriage to Phalti on her, accusing her of a lack of truthfulness and constancy. I quote the words of one: "The fatal lack of truth and depth in her character is further shown by the facility with which she submits to become the wife of Phalti, or Phaltiel, of Gallim. Certes, had she resisted, as the wife of David ought, such a degradation and such a crime during the lifetime of her illustrious husband, some mention would be made of it; for she should have resisted to the death, as became a heroic soldier's true wife. Or had her love been worthy of him,

even without her rank and her influence, it would have enabled her to make her way to him over every obstacle. That no effort of the kind is recorded of her, is sufficient evidence that no such effort was made; and this gives us a measure of her worth. And the privilege of being associated with David during these trying years, and of ministering, as only a true woman and wife can, to the comfort and consolation of one so harrassed and hunted! And the further glory of having her name thus coupled with his, as the angel of his exile, in those sublime songs composed during his wanderings, and sung on every point of the globe, and through all time, by synagogue and by church!"

Quoting again from Michal's critic: "It does not exalt David in our estimation, that he should have been so eager to reclaim her, or to take her into a household where other wives—one of them, at least, far superior to Michal in every womanly virtue—were prepared to dispute her priority of rank, and her influence over the new king."

I do not agree with this harsh criticism. Whatever Michal was, she does not appear to me to have been fickle. Let us consider the trying position in which she was placed as the wife of David and the daughter of his enemy, Saul, and give her the benefit of the doubt.

I believe that as much good can be said of Abigail. When she became David's wife he was in the deepest of his early troubles. Hunted like a

wild beast by the jealous Saul, he did not know an hour of absolute safety. In this uncertain life Abigail readily joined him—too readily, some say, to show proper respect for her dead husband. But, considering the circumstances, this seems a small and unimportant criticism. True to him through the period of his outlawry, she remained true during the time of his kingship and prosperity. Nor did she ask, as a consideration of her devotion, that her son be named as David's successor. Daniel was never mentioned as a claimant to the throne.

I wish it were possible to speak as highly of Bathsheba; but the facts are against her. It could not have been love which prompted her to betray her husband in his absence. It must have been an ignoble ambition—a desire to get into the good graces of the king. For this she sacrificed husband, home, and honor. Not content with this, she entered with unseemly zeal into the contest between her son Solomon and Adonijah; if indeed, we are not safe in supposing that she had already obtained, by undue influence, a promise from David that her son should be his successor. In none of these acts were exhibited the noble, womanly qualities we admire so much in Sarah, Ruth, and Hannah. Dr. Smith says, "Nothing that we know of Bathsheba leads us to think of her as likely to mould her son's mind and heart to the higher forms of goodness. Therefore, may it not be that the sensuality which Solomon, notwithstand-

ing his wisdom and some other excellent traits, exhibited in his later life, was due in part to his mother's unconscious influence over him?" We are very loth to pass so harsh judgment upon her, but there seems no other course open to us.

The one good trait we are told of by the sacred record, is her thorough devotion to her son and his interests, though even this was carried to an extreme which almost rendered it a fault. If, indeed, it be possible that a mother's devotion can be considered a fault in any event.



X. RIZPAH.

Sorrowing Rizpah! Suffering for the sins of her husband's house, and suffering through her children, she furnishes us with one of the saddest stories in Bible history. She was the concubine of Saul, and mother of two of his sons. Armoni and Mephibosheth.

There had been a famine in the land for three years. No rain had fallen, crops had failed, and the people were dying of starvation. Regarding the destitution which prevailed, Willis makes Mephibosheth say to Rizpah, his mother:

"I sold

My Lybian barb for but a cake of meal—
Lo! this—my mother! As I pass'd the street,
I hid it in my mantle, for there stand
Famishing mothers, with their starving babes,
At every threshold; and wild, desperate men
Prowl, with the eyes of tigers, up and down,
Watching to rob those who, from house to house,
Beg for the dying."

Upon David's inquiring of the Lord the cause of this famine, he was told that it had come because Saul and his house had not been punished for his destruction of the Gibeonites, contrary to the promise of safety made to them by Joshua,

David then asked the Gibeonites what would satisfy them by way of vengeance against Saul's house, Saul himself having been dead for several years. The Gibeonites demanded that seven of Saul's male descendants be delivered up to them, to be crucified, or "hanged before the Lord in Gibeah." In response to this demand, the two sons of Rizpah and five sons of Merab, Michal's sister, were delivered up.

These seven men were slain by crucifixion, we presume, this being the most humiliating death an Israelite could suffer. Their bodies were left hanging from Passover time, early in April, to the time of autumn rain, October. "And Rizpah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night."

There was motherly devotion! For six long months, in the dry, burning heat of day and the chill of night, this noble mother sat by the bodies, scarcely closing her eyes in sleep, scarcely eating, scarcely drinking. The croaking of the raven, the scream of the eagle, the howling of the wolf, the hideous cry of the hyena were alike unable to frighten her from her position of guard over the bodies. We should search in vain through sacred and profane history, for a more striking instance of womanly heroism. It was sublime. So striking was it, indeed, that David, when he heard of it,

was filled with admiration; and though the bones of crucified men were considered accursed, he sent for the remains of these men, and had them buried with due solemnity, out of respect for Rizpah's faithfulness.

While we are at a loss to understand why the death of these seven men should be demanded for the cessation of the famine, yet we can understand the feeling which prompted Rizpah to what she did. It was the love of a mother, triumphing over every fear and danger. And this pure, sacred love is nowhere spoken more highly of than in the Bible, and nowhere better exemplified than in the case of Rizpah.



XI. THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

Although more than a thousand women are mentioned in connection with the reign of Solomon, only one of them has left her name and personality indelibly stamped on the history of that reign. This one is the Queen of Sheba. She is spoken of merely with reference to a visit which she was prompted by curiosity to make to the splendid court of Solomon, the fame of which had spread to all the known world.

Although the place where the Queen of Sheba lived and reigned is not definitely known, most authorities locate it in southeastern Arabia, "Happy Arabia," as it is called on account of its richness. Others, however, have thought that her kingdom was in Abyssinia. Dr. Smith states that the first of these opinions is undoubtedly correct.

At any rate, this queen was attracted by the splendor of Solomon's kingdom, as reported to her by rumor, and she determined to make a visit there to investigate for herself. She set out with a great train of attendants, and camel loads of rich, costly presents, to show her respect for Solomon's greatness. The Biblical account of her visit is very simple. It says that she saw Solomon's

greatness; communed with him; asked him deep questions, all of which he answered; paid him a very high compliment on his greatness and wisdom; and gave him a fabulous amount of gold, besides precious stones and rare spices. After receiving appropriate gifts from Solomon, she departed.

But this brief account, as given in the Bible, has been expanded by Jewish tradition until her visit is made one of the most important and romantic episodes of Solomon's reign. Some of the legends of her visit are given in the Talmud, and reference is made to them here to show how great an impression was made on the Jews by the visit of this one woman. These legends have to do chiefly with her magnificence, and with the hard questions which she submitted to Solomon and the ease with which he answered them.

Some of these riddles are very ingenious, and illustrate the subtle intellect of the orientals, and their aptness at curious questioning. On this account, the insertion of a few of them in this sketch is not out of place. She is said to have asked him to bore a hole and pass a thread through one of the smallest and hardest precious stones. His great knowledge of natural history came to his aid, and he accomplished the task by means of a small worm, which ate its way through the gem, carrying the thread with it.

Another problem given him to solve was to distinguish by sight between two bouquets, one of

natural, the other of artificial flowers. This he did by opening the window and allowing a few bees to enter. They immediately sought the natural flowers, "and Israel's king learned wisdom from the bees."

An ingenious expedient was made use of to distinguish by distant sight between a group of boys and one of girls, all twelve years old, and dressed alike. Solomon had them wash their hands. There was no mistaking the result. The girls rolled their sleeves above the elbows, while with the boys the high watermark was no higher than the wrist. It was a different problem to fill a goblet with clear water, which was to come neither from the springs of earth nor the clouds or dews of air. A servant was told to mount a white charger, and ride him furiously. When the horse returned, perspiring and panting, Solomon filled the goblet with sweat from its foaming sides.

But these fanciful legends merely serve to emphasize the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon—they do not throw any light upon it. This visit and the woman who made it will always be the subject of legend more than of history. In this connection it may not be out of place to state that the Abyssinians regard their king, Menelik, as a descendant of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, basing the claim on two suppositions: first, that Sheba was in eastern Africa, and not in Arabia; and second, that Solomon married the queen on the occasion of her visit. It may be said,

however, that neither supposition receives the sanction of many modern authorities.

O'Reilly says of this visit: "It were a crime to do the memory of this royal lady the gratuitous wrong to make her the lover of Solomon. Nothing in the sacred page warrants the imputation thus cast upon her by the national vanity of some Jewish writers. She had come to seek religious truths from 'the ends of the earth,' for her kingdom bordered on the southern sea: and she had been happy enough to obtain it from the lips of a man whom a corrupt heart had not yet made a fool of, and who was then—in the plenitude of his pure fame—the lively image of Christ, the King of peace and truth. These impressions were still further deepened into settled conviction by the spectacle of the public piety daily afforded by the nation. And she returned home to Sheba a worshiper of the God of Shem and Noah. Well had it been if the end of Solomon's reign had been in conformity with such a beginning. Not only all Arabia, but Egypt, and farthest Ethiopia, as well as Palestine and Syria, must have been won by the pacific wisdom of a king and a people whose heart was in God's hand, who made him and his interests supreme, and who, in turn, must have been set by the Lord above all princes and peoples."

XII. JEZEBEL AND ATHALIAH.

It is an unpleasant task to trace the lives and characters of the two women who did more than any others to bring wickedness and calamities on the people of Israel. To all human appearance, if it had not been for the evil influence of Jezebel in the northern kingdom, Israel, and of her daughter Athaliah in the southern kingdom, Judah, the terrible calamities which afflicted the two realms would have been avoided, or at least very much delayed.

The luxury and extravagance of the great King Solomon had paved the way for the revolt of Jeroboam, leader of the ten tribes, against Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor. If Jeroboam had done nothing but revolt, his action might have been excused, at least in part; but unfortunately, he did worse. He established the idolatrous worship of the golden calf at two places in his kingdom, Dan and Bethel. The curse of God came upon his realm; for, founded in idolatry and rebellion, it remained idolatrous and rebellious almost to the last.

But the calf-worship of Jeroboam's time was as nothing compared with the horrible forms of idola-

try destined to be introduced by the wife of one of his successors. The calf represented one of the comparatively mild and harmless cults of Egypt, while the worship of Baal, associated with that of his consort, Ashtoreth, included and demanded nameless horrors.

Already two rebellions and changes of government had taken place among the ten tribes. The house of Jeroboam had been overthrown, and all its males destroyed by Baasha: and his house, in turn, had come to a similar end through Zimri. Tibni and Zimri had been defeated by Omri, who was raised to the throne by his soldiers. The idolatrous Omri was followed in the kingship by his still more idolatrous son, Ahab. This man, in order, apparently, to defy Jehovah, and fasten the sin of idolatry unchangeably upon the people, took to wife Jezebel, daughter of the Zidonian king, Ethbaal. It is this woman whose history, character, and influence will here be traced.

In order the better to understand her character, it will be necessary to take a brief account of that of her husband. Ahab was weak, rather than wicked: one of those timid, uncertain characters, who make excellent followers, but very poor leaders. Given a wife of high mind, pure feelings, and generous impulses, and possessed of Jezebel's strength of will, he might have reigned in such a way as to be entitled to the admiration and gratitude of all true worshipers and lovers of Jehovah. For we cannot but believe that he was

a man of good heart. Indeed, even when he had fallen to the lowest depths of his degradation, he showed some indications of repentance, which might have borne fruit, but for the blighting influence of his wife.

For Jezebel was great and strong in wickedness. With her there was no compromise. Whenever the least sign of wavering was manifested by Ahab, she placed the halter on his head, and led him into the mire of villany. If he longed for anything, she devised means—and no means was too low or wicked—for him to gain his desire. If he showed the least tendency to befriend the prophets of Jehovah, and protect their worship, she drove him to the altar of Baal, and forced him to become a persecutor of the servants of God.

Revolting as is the history of her life—full as it is of dark deeds and fearful retribution, yet some profit may come from a recital of it, in the fact that by contrast we are taught some of our most valuable lessons; and, being shown the pitfall, we may go the other way.

Her marriage to Ahab marked the commencement of a complete change of worship in the northern kingdom. Previously, Jehovah had been generally worshiped, although some instances of calf-worship had been known; indeed, this idolatry was much more prevalent than it should have been. But when Jezebel came into the kingdom, she could brook no worship but that of the Zidonian god and goddess, Baal and Ashtoreth. There-

fore, her first official act was to put to the sword, or drive into the kingdom of Judah, all the prophets of Jehovah. In their stead she appointed, and fed at her table, upwards of eight hundred priests of her deities. Under her influence her weak husband set up altars to Baal; made groves where the licentious worship of Ashtoreth could be carried on unchecked; placed Asheras, or obscene images, to excite the worshipers to greater frenzy; did everything, indeed, that he could to please Jezebel, inculcate her religion, and destroy the worship of Jehovah.

The kingdom was rapidly hastening to idolatrous decay, when there appeared upon the scene one of the most striking, picturesque, and noble characters of all history, the Prophet Elijah. Appearing before Jezebel—as sudden as the lightning and as ominous as the storm-cloud—he uttered the fateful words, “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” Who was this uncouth man? In the council chamber of King Ahab, hung with the richest draperies of the east; in the presence of the strong queen, Jezebel, clothed in the costly purple of her native shores; before the uplifted spears and axes of warriors and guards, stood this mighty servant of God, dressed in coarse tunic and sheepskin mantle. We can imagine the cry of execration and horror which followed his fierce and sudden denunciation, the voice of Jezebel

sounding above the rest, and ordering his immediate punishment. But the man of God fled, and Jezebel could only nurse her wrath and watch the devastation of the land by famine.

Thus passed three weary years; and "the heavens were brass, and the earth was iron," because of the drouth. Men and beasts suffered the torture of unappeased hunger and unquenched thirst; until it seemed that the cattle and horses even of the royal stables must perish. The king himself went forth in one part of the land, sending his servant Obadiah into the other part, to see if enough water could not be collected to save the cattle of the king. Obadiah had been, and still was, a friend of the prophets of God. During Jezebel's fierce and fatal attack on them, he had hidden a hundred of them in two caves, and fed them at his own risk. As this man went forth he was confronted by Elijah, who told him to go to Jezebel and her husband and tell them whom he had seen. Obadiah trembled at this command. Had not Elijah suddenly disappeared before, and was he not likely to do so again, leaving Obadiah to endure the queen's wrath alone? But this was not Elijah's time to flee. He must do his duty in showing to Jezebel and to Israel how weak was Baal, how strong Jehovah.

When Ahab met Elijah his greeting was, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" But Elijah's answer was strong and fearless: "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house,

in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." Then came the challenge to Jezebel and her gods. The eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and Ash-toreth were to test with Elijah the supremacy of Jehovah. The two bullocks—the altars—the prayers and self-mutilations of the priests of Baal, the fire from heaven on Elijah's altar—these incidents need no repetition here.

Now came the fierce retribution of Jehovah against these false priests. Not only were they foes to true worship—they were, as well, traitors to the state; for Jehovah was their king, and they had deceived the people into allegiance to another god. The doom of the traitor is death. It is the unwritten law of nations, more just than written statutes, that he who betrays is worse than he who kills. "By man shall his blood be shed." Therefore it was the duty of Elijah, binding upon him by the law of nations and the law of God, to take those traitorous priests and put them to the sword. It mattered not that they were Jezebel's creatures and tools, and that, therefore, her fierce resentment would burn forth against him. Now, as at all times, he must do his duty, no matter what the consequences.

As if the shedding of the blood of these men was in propitiation for their own sins and the sins of the people, the drouth was broken by a heavy rain from the west, in the face of which Elijah ran

before Ahab's chariot, twenty miles to the gates of Jezreel.

When Ahab told Jezebel how her priests had died, and how he, himself, had been cowed and subdued in Elijah's presence, her rage knew no bounds. In her eyes there was but one enemy to Israel, and he must die. In the name of her gods, she sent word to him that he had not one full day of life. And he who could stand before Ahab and the priests of Baal, and pronounce against them the doom of Jehovah's wrath, fled in fear from the face of the fierce Jezebel. So great were his fear and discouragement, that he prayed to God to take from him the life which seemed to him so useless.

But he was to meet Ahab and Jezebel in another capacity—to pronounce God's woe anew against them. The occasion was apt. One Naboth had a vineyard which Ahab coveted. He wished to buy it, but Naboth refused to sell. He would have seized it, but the law of Hebrew inheritances was strict, and protected the peasant against the king. Ahab acted like a spoiled, petulant child. He lay on the bed, turned his face to the wall, and refused to eat. His wife, his evil genius, came to him and asked him why he pined and fretted. She laughed at his story, and asked if he was not the king. Could not the king seize and hold?

Her plan was quickly formed. She wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, telling the men of Jezreel, Naboth's city, to

proclaim a fast, as for some great calamity, and accuse Naboth of blasphemy. Two men were to be bribed to testify against him. Her orders were carried out. Naboth was convicted through perjury, and he and his sons were stoned to death. Word of this brutal murder was sent, not to him in whose name, but to her by whose order, it had been committed. She told the timid Ahab to go and seize the vineyard of the murdered man.

Now Ahab was all action- another had removed the obstacles from his path. Mounting his chariot, he started toward Jezreel to possess Naboth's vineyard. But like a lion in the way stood the dreaded Elijah. "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" exclaimed the startled king. "I have found thee," answered the prophet. Then followed the prediction of fearful evil on Ahab and his house, which thrilled the coward soul of the king, and caused him to rend his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fast in dust and ashes. The doom was terrible. As the murdered Naboth had fallen outside the walls of Jezreel, and the dogs had lapped up his blood, even so should the blood of Ahab be eaten in the same place. All the males of his house were to partake of the curse, dying and leaving no posterity. And of Jezebel, the author and inciter of all this evil, who by her counsels had made Israel a house of sin and death, it was said, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel."

No fiercer or more terrible curse than this has

ever been pronounced on a man or a household:—utter annihilation, and that annihilation to be brought about in so fearful a way.

For a time the record is occupied with the affairs of Ahab, and Jezebel is scarcely mentioned. There is no doubt, however, that she was still prominent and active, and Ahab's chief inciter to the fatal war against Syria at Ramoth-Gilead. In this fierce battle Ahab was mortally wounded, and, with his blood running into the chariot, was carried to Jezreel, dying on the way. As the chariot was washed out, on the very spot where Naboth had met his death, the dogs enjoyed another carnival of blood. Ahab's son and successor met accidental death after a reign of two years, and soon afterward the great prophet Elijah went to his reward. Another son of Ahab and Jezebel now occupied the throne, being strongly influenced, no doubt, by the queen-mother. It was during this reign that Elisha came into prominence.

The anointing of Jehu by Elisha, as the instrument to bring about the destruction of the house of Ahab, introduces the last chapter in the history of Jezebel. It was one of the most stirring episodes in Bible history. Anxious to be the first to bring tidings of his anointing to Ahab's widow and son, Jehu sprang into his chariot and drove furiously toward Jezreel. The watchman on the wall saw him approaching; and a messenger was sent out to meet him, crying, "Peace or war?" He was sternly ordered to turn in behind Jehu's char-

iot. A second messenger obeyed the same order. Then Ahab's son, the king, went out to meet the approaching charioteer. Jehu recognized him, and remembering the commandment he had received to destroy the house of Ahab, he shot an arrow into the king's body, and killed him.

Accompanying the king was his nephew, grandson of Ahab and Jezebel, who was then king of Judah. He was also set upon by Jehu's men and slain. With his furious speed scarcely checked at all by these acts of vengeance, the conqueror entered the city. The alarm of his coming had been brought to Jezebel. And now her immoral, unscrupulous character was fully manifested. Like Cleopatra, centuries afterward, she determined to overcome the victor by her charms. Going into an upper chamber, she painted her face, dressed her hair, colored her eyelids, bedecked herself with jewels, and looked out upon the street along which Jehu was to drive. As he passed, she called to him, and hurled at him half a challenge, half a taunt. But it was no Julius Caesar, no Marc Antony, ready to fall a victim to the charms of the enchantress. It was rather an Octavius, sternly staunch, and proof against passion. Looking toward her window, Jehu called, "Who is on my side? who?" As two of Jezebel's officers looked out, he ordered them to throw her to the pavement. As she fell, crushed out of human semblance, Jehu drove his chariot over her body, and her blood was sprinkled on horses, wheels, and walls.

Still pursuing his triumphant course, Jehu entered the palace, as if to establish beyond doubt his claim to the throne, and ordered a feast. But when he had eaten, he seems to have felt some compunctions of conscience that he had allowed the body of a king's daughter to be treated with indignity, and left without burial. Therefore, he sent some of his officers to take up her remains and bury them with becoming honor. But on reaching the street, they found that the famishing dogs which infest eastern cities, had devoured Jezebel's body, leaving only the skull, the feet, and the palms of the hands. Thus was fulfilled the terrible doom of Elijah, "In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel."

As if intent upon leaving none of the seed of the accursed Jezebel, Jehu ordered seventy male descendants of Ahab to be put to death, and their heads heaped up at the gates of Jezreel. His zeal carried him still farther. Gathering together all the worshipers of Baal, under pretence of offering a great sacrifice to that god, he ordered his soldiers to fall on them and put them all to the sword. He could then truthfully declare, with grim humor, that he had made a greater offering to Baal than any one else. Thus the idolatrous, licentious worship was destroyed from Israel.

But through the influence of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, this worship was extended into Judah, the southern kingdom. She had married Jehoram, king of Judah, and exerted much

the same influence over him that Jezebel had exerted over Ahab. The Baal worship was extensively introduced, and it largely superseded the pure worship of Jehovah. We have no doubt that Athaliah equaled her mother in the grossness and wickedness of this worship.

After the death of her husband and her son Ahaziah, who was slain by Jehu, Athaliah executed one of the boldest maneuvers recorded in Bible history. Determined, as it seems, to destroy the royal family of Judah, and establish the Zidonian dynasty and worship, she slew, as she thought, all of her own and her husband's male descendants. She then seized the throne, and ruled with absolute power for six years.

But one of the sons of Ahaziah, an infant named Joash, escaped Athaliah's massacre. This child was carefully hidden by his nurse Jehosheba for six years, until the time should be ripe for him to be proclaimed king in his father's stead. During all this time, Athaliah was sedulously at work tearing down the worship and changing the developments of centuries, with the aim of so thoroughly establishing her power that it could not be overthrown.

The restoration of the line of Judah to the throne was very sudden. The six year old boy was secretly taken into the temple, and anointed and proclaimed king by Jehoiada, the priest. In their joy at the restoration of the rightful line to the throne, the people shouted and sounded their

trumpets, doubtless with the triumphal cry, "Long live the king!" Athaliah ran to the sanctuary, and saw her grandson, newly crowned, standing by a pillar. She raised the cry, "Treason! treason!" but no one responded to it. All were too weary of her wicked tyranny, to desire it extended. As she fled in despair, the stern order was given by Jehoiada that she be slain. She was followed to a place outside the sanctuary, and there put to death.

The fact to be particularly noted in the lives of these two women is that they lived in violence and treachery, and died deaths of violence. To them the peace and tranquillity of purely domestic life were denied. Mingling as they did in the great affairs of state—leaving as they did the safe anchorage of the home, they were drawn into all the intrigues and contentions of corrupt monarchies. Coming into such relationship, they could no longer expect to be treated as women, but as political intriguers. Therefore they suffered, as they could not help anticipating, all the disrespect and danger attaching to such intrigue. In this respect as well as in their wickedness, Jezebel and Athaliah present a very marked contrast to most of the other women whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament. Happily, the two stand almost alone. As has been seen, the Old Testament women are noted for their domesticity. Home life, not public life, for women, is emphasized. In no respect is this more clearly manifested than in the fact that the women who are mentioned most prominently in pub-

lic life are shown to us in the most unfavorable light. Again is emphasized the lesson that woman's greatest honor, peace, and joy are to be found in the home.



XIII. THE FRIENDS OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

It is pleasing to record that during the troublous times of Jezebel and Athaliah, two women came into prominence whose lives and characters were in striking contrast to those of the two queens. Neither of these women is known to us by name, yet their influence is none the less striking on that account.

The first is introduced during the great famine in the days of Elijah. After he had appeared before Ahab and Jezebel, and predicted the famine, he was forced to flee to the brook Cherith to escape the fury of the queen. Here, as long as the brook contained water, he was miraculously fed by ravens. But when the brook dried up, he was told to go to a certain widow's house in the city Zarephath, or Sarepta, in the land of Phœnicia.

Here is a striking illustration of the absence of true faith among the Israelites. The prophet of God was forced to flee from his own land, and the chosen people of God, to take refuge in the country of the Sidonians! So striking is it, that Christ made use of it to illustrate and explain his

own rejection, in the same land, eight centuries later. (Luke 4: 25, 26.) "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months; when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent save (but) unto Sarepta a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow."

As Elijah neared the hut of this widow, he saw her outside the house, gathering sticks. Approaching her, he asked for food. She told him that she had in the house only a handful of meal and a little oil (for the famine prevailed there also) and she was about to bake a cake for her son and herself, that they might eat it and then die. The prophet's request was a strange one, calculated to test the faith of this poor widow. Said he, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day the Lord sends the rain upon the earth."

She did as directed; and the handful of meal and the few drops of oil in the cruse lasted through the entire period of famine.

But this was not the only trial of her faith. During Elijah's stay the child sickened and died.

In the midst of her sorrow, Elijah carried the child into his own room and laid him on the bed,

stretched himself on the body three times, and prayed earnestly for the restoration of the child's life. Elijah's prayer was heard and answered, and the child was delivered to his mother. He may not have fully established his authority as a prophet before this time to her satisfaction, but now she could say, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

Thus had her great faith developed into knowledge. If, as some Bible authorities believe, this son of the widow afterward became the great prophet Jonah, whose mission was to the mighty and wicked city of Nineveh, she must have strongly impressed that faith on him; for the task he performed was so herculean that even he, notwithstanding his faith, shrank from it at first.

"When, long ages after the widow's day, the crusaders possessed themselves of Palestine, they sought out Sarepta, and built a chapel on the spot revered as the site of her house. That, like many other monuments of their brief sway, has entirely disappeared. Like Tyre and Sidon and Byblos, and all the proud Phœnician cities that gemmed the white shore of the Mediterranean, not a monument, and scarcely the fragment of a ruin, remains. The modern village of Surafend has crept up the hillside to the farthest extremity of what were once the suburbs of the populous and thrifty city. But to the beach, once hallowed by the tread of the great prophet's weary feet, clings the

sweet remembrance of his tender pity, and of the widow of Sarepta's charity.

"Mighty commonwealths that then ruled along these coasts have vanished; kingdoms have arisen and fallen there; the armies of the Christian West and Paynim East have alternately upheld there the supremacy of cross or crescent; but like the pot of meal that wasted not, and the widow's cruse of oil that never diminished, the healthful influence of supernatural virtues then practiced flows in a perennial spring from the white cliffs of Sarepta."

A companion picture to this is presented in the case of the woman who befriended Elisha. She was a woman of considerable wealth, who lived with her husband in the vicinity of Shunem. Becoming aware of the fact that Elisha was under the necessity of making frequent tours throughout this country, visiting, no doubt, the various schools or companies of prophets, she generously provided a room in a tower of her house, where he could rest. It was understood that whenever he passed that way, and was weary, he could go to his room, which was apart from the rest of the house, going and coming and resting at his convenience. We have no doubt that this generous act of hers was fully appreciated, and that good use was made of the privilege by the prophet.

His appreciation is shown by acts of kindness which he performed for her. She had prayed long and earnestly for a son. By the power of prophecy Elisha promised an answer to her prayer, and she

and her husband were overjoyed by the birth of a son.

In the boy's early childhood, he was in the field with his father, when he suddenly threw his hand to his head and exclaimed, "O my head, my head!" His father rushed to him, took him up, and had him carried to his mother. He sat on her knees till noon, and died. Elisha and his servant were not there at the time. The distracted mother seems to have had faith that he who had the power of promising her a son, would have the power, under God, of restoring him to her. Accordingly, she set out in search of him.

On hearing of the death of the boy, Elisha hurriedly sent his staff to the house by his servant, with orders that it be laid on the child's face. He himself followed as soon as possible. The staff was laid on the child's body, but failed to produce any effect. When Elisha came he prayed most earnestly for the child's restoration. He stretched himself upon the body and lay there until his own warmth was imparted to the child. Rising, he walked to and fro, summoning up all possible faith. Returning to the bed, he again stretched himself upon the body, and the child's spirit was restored. The mother was called to the room, and bowing down in gratitude before the prophet, she took up her living child.

On a later occasion, doubtless after the death of her husband, she was the object of Elisha's protecting care. He gave her prophetic warning of a

seven years' famine, and told her to sojourn for that time in the fertile land of the Philistines. But during her absence her land was taken away. We do not know whether it was an actual case of violent seizure of her land or merely a sale of her inheritance without her full consent. In either case she would be entitled to its return; for the law of inheritances among the Hebrews was that the land could not permanently pass out of the hands of its original possessor. At the year of jubilee, or sooner, it must be restored. In this particular case, her helplessness probably rendered necessary an earlier return than usual, and Elisha and his servant used their influence with the king, to have her land given back to her, with the value of all harvests reaped in her absence. Their efforts were successful; and so full of human interest, and especially womanly interest, is the Bible, that every detail of this simple, homely story is given.

"Thus, through all these years, when hope had been growing fainter and fainter, and the weariness of exile and the burthen of distress constantly greater, he who remembers a cup of cold water given in his name to the chance passer-by, treasured up the memory of that widow's every good deed, and kept guard over her home and her son's inheritance, and restored them all in due time, with the revenues of the lands down to the hour when the royal award was given."

In fact, numerous instances of Elisha's kind-

ness, of which women were the objects, are related in detail. But in each case woman's faith is the determining cause and condition of the benefit received. Without this faith, so strong in woman, the blessing would be impossible. Such is the tribute paid to the faith of woman by the Old Testament in the stories of the friends of Elijah and Elisha.

The feelings of the Shunammite woman at the death of her son and at his restoration by Elisha, are thus described by the poet:

"Suddenly

Her hand shrunk from him, and the color fled
From her fix'd lip, and her supporting knees
Were shook beneath her child. Her hand had touch'd
His forehead, as she dallied with his hair—
And it was cold—like clay! Slow, very slow,
Came the misgiving that her child was dead.
She sat a moment, and her eyes were closed
In a dumb prayer for strength, and then she took
His little hand and pressed it earnestly—
And put her lip to his—and look'd again
Fearfully on him—and then bending low,
She whisper'd in his ear, "My son!—my son!"
And as the echo died, and not a sound
Broke on the stillness, and he lay there still—
Motionless on her knee—the truth *would* come!
And with a sharp, quick cry, as if her heart
Were crushed, she lifted him and held him close
Into her bosom—with a mother's thought—
As if death had no power to touch him there!
The man of God came forth, and led the child
Unto his mother, and went on his way.
And he was there—her beautiful—her own—
Living and smiling on her—with his arms
Folded about her neck, and his warm breath
Breathing upon her lips, and in her ear
The music of his gentle voice once more!"

XIV. VASHTI AND ESTHER.

The scenes of the drama of these two women's lives are laid outside the Hebrew country. More than a century had passed since the Jews had been carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Two and a half centuries had passed since the kingdom in which Jezebel ruled and Elijah and Elisha prophesied, had fallen at the hand of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. The mighty kingdom of Babylon had passed out of existence and its place had been taken by the less glorious kingdom of Persia. Cyrus and Darius, the two great kings of the Persians, had lived and reigned, and the kingdom had fallen into the hands of the son of Darius, the weak, but luxurious Xerxes, or Ahasuerus. Two of his wives, queens in succession, form the subject of this chapter.

Vashti was his first queen. She was a Persian woman of great beauty and considerable force of character,—too much force we should judge, for her to be an obedient and devoted wife, according to the Persian idea.

The king made a feast. To it were invited

the great lords and other officers of the court. Wine flowed freely; for although the early Persians had been very abstemious, those of Ahasuerus' time vied with one another in drinking. They drank, however, out of cups made of amethyst, under the impression that the intoxicating power of the wine was thus destroyed.

That Ahasuerus himself was at least somewhat "elevated" with the wine he had taken, we have no doubt; for in the midst of the festivities, with wine-inflamed men about him, he made a most peculiar request. Knowing, as we do, the Persian women's customs regarding publicity, we wonder what frame of mind he was in to command Vashti to appear unveiled and expose her face to the group of noisy, hilarious, drunken men. But the order was given. The king desired his nobles to see how beautiful his wife was.

Vashti was forced to choose between the Persian idea of wifely duty, and the Persian idea of womanly modesty. Had she obeyed her husband he would have been dishonored as well as she; for it was the unwritten law of the Persians that the woman who exposed her face to the view of men in public, proclaimed herself a wanton and her husband a dishonored man. Therefore, it was an easy matter for Vashti to decide. Better, she thought, and rightly, lose position, power, and prestige—better give place to another than be unwomanly. And we cannot help admiring her for the choice she made.

But Ahasuerus was furious. He had been disobeyed by his wife, in the presence of all his nobles. It was easy in his excited frame of mind to believe that his guests had been insulted, or that they were laughing at his discomfiture. Or perhaps they were fearful that Vashti's disobedience would become contagious; that the women throughout the empire would consider hers a test case. If she went unpunished they would rebel against their husbands, and "woman's rights" be established centuries before the proper time! In fact, we cannot imagine any thought too extravagant for his excited mind.

Therefore, the question was not on the advisability of punishing her. Punished she must be and at once. The only question was on the proper means of punishment. A council of the wise men, or magi, was called to settle this question. After due deliberation, they decided that she must be deposed from her position as queen, as an example to deter other women from similar disobedience. The action was taken and Vashti was deposed.

Again it must be said that Vashti's attitude was worthy of all admiration. She was placed in a position where she had to choose between losing her station and forfeiting true womanhood. That she chose the former, causes us to respect and admire her far more than would the opposite course. No one can afford to sacrifice manhood or womanhood, which is the heritage of a lifetime, for position or power, which, at the best, may last but a

few fleeting years. She who chooses as Vashti chose, between the insane request of a drunken husband, and her own womanly integrity, will not lose permanently through any present sacrifice. And may not the moral be extended into other affairs? Who has ever prospered through sacrificing principle to position? The lesson of Vashti's self-sacrifice is a life-lesson. Though no more is said of her in the sacred record, yet the influence of her life, if properly understood, will extend throughout the ages.

I am pleased to find my opinion of Vashti's action confirmed by a very excellent authority: "Here we have another (folly) in the insult offered to his queen;—the order that she should exhibit herself to a crowd of drunken revelers (kings, princes, and plebeians of every class), to gratify the whim of her royal lord. We praise and bless her memory, in that with the self-respect of a true woman, and the lawful pride of a queen, she peremptorily refused. It cost her a crown, and led to the providential exaltation of a humble Hebrew maiden; but, while remembering the piety and courageous self-devotion of Esther, we cannot forget the modesty and magnanimity of the beautiful though unfortunate Vashti."

The familiar story of Esther needs only a brief repetition here, to bring it forcibly to the recollection of my readers. After Esther's advancement, she still considered herself under the control and guardianship of her foster father, Mordecái; and

he absolutely forbade her informing the king that she was a Jewess. About this time Mordecai, who had some office in Ahasuerus' court, and "sat at the gate of the palace," discovered a plot made by two chamberlains to assassinate the king, and foiled it by revealing it to Esther. Mention of this great service to the king was made in the court records, but no reward was given to Mordecai.

One Haman had been advanced by the king to the position of chief of his courtiers, or advisers, and all the servants and officers of the king's household, except Mordecai, did him reverence. This contempt on the part of Mordecai aroused the bitter resentment of Haman, who, hearing that his enemy was a Jew, determined upon destroying him and all the Jews throughout the Persian empire. It was a comparatively easy matter for Haman to get the signature of the careless, indifferent king to the edict ordering the massacre; first, because he represented the Jews to be a pernicious and dangerous people; second, because Haman offered to pay to the king ten thousand talents of silver, probably about seventeen millions of dollars, for the privilege of killing all the Jews and seizing their property.

"It is the old, old story. No enemy of true religion, from the days of Haman down to this advanced period in the nineteenth century after Christ, ever bethought him of stirring up sovereigns or legislatures to measures of persecution,

without assigning as the determining motive the fact that the obnoxious creed and its professors were 'a people apart' amid the mass of the surrounding populations; that their religious practices constitute 'new laws and ceremonies,' the use of which is a practical contempt of the state ordinances. When the self-love of the despot—be that a single person, or the many-headed body of the legislature, or the mob—has been stirred up to the necessary degree of vindictiveness, then some such consideration as the 'ten thousand talents' proves a resistless argument, before which justice, innocence, and even the memory of recent and glorious services, are of no avail."

When this edict went forth into all the provinces of the Persian empire, it reduced the Jews to a condition of deep mourning and intense anxiety. In order to attract Esther's attention, Mordecai was particularly vehement in his mourning; going through the streets of the city weeping and wailing, and standing outside the palace gate, dressed in sackcloth. Thereupon, Esther sent her attendant to learn what caused Mordecai such grief. In answer, he sent her a copy of the king's decree of destruction, and commanded her to go and plead before the king for herself and her people. She excused herself on the plea that she would be running a great personal risk to go into the king's presence unannounced. Mordecai's reply resembled a threat. He told Esther that if she thought to save her own life, by leaving her

people to destruction, a miraculous deliverance would come to the Jews, but she and her father's house would perish. She then sent out the request that all the Jews fast with her and her maidens for three days, and at the end of that time she would go into the king's presence to make intercession for her people; adding these words, "If I perish, I perish."

The sceptre of mercy was held out to her, and she made her request, that Haman and the king attend, on the following day, a banquet which she was preparing. When the proud, flattered Haman went to his home from the banquet, he was greatly incensed at Mordecai's continued scorn, and, on the advice of his friends, he built a gallows seventy-five feet high, on which to hang the Jew.

That night the king was unable to sleep, and in order to make the time pass less heavily, he had his scribes read to him the records of the court. Thackeray says that such records form a perfect remedy for sleeplessness. As they read, they came to the account of Mordecai's saving the king's life. Ahasuerus asked what reward had been given for this great service, and was told that Mordecai had received none.

The next morning, when Haman came into the palace, Xerxes asked him what should be done to him whom the king delighted to honor. Of course, Haman thought that he was referred to, and suggested that the royal apparel be brought, the man dressed in it, and mounted on the king's horse;

that the horse be led through the streets of the city by one of the highest officers of the king, and the rider be proclaimed as a man whom the king delighted to honor. The advice pleased the capricious Xerxes, and he told Haman to do to Mordecai as he had said.

This was the commencement of Haman's downfall. As he went, crestfallen, to his home, his wife told him that Mordecai the Jew had begun to prevail against him; and that his (Haman's) destruction was sure. At that moment Haman was summoned to the second banquet with Xerxes and Esther. During the banquet the king again asked Esther her petition, and she pleaded for the lives of herself and her people. In anger the king asked who had formed such a plot. Esther denounced Haman to the king. Xerxes in his indignation went out to call the guards to carry the wretched man away; and Haman fell on Esther's couch to beg for mercy. Returning, the king misjudged Haman's position, and thought him guilty of insulting the queen. Hearing that a gallows had been built for Mordecai, Xerxes ordered Haman hanged on it.

As it was the rule that a decree once given by the king of Persia could not be recalled, another proclamation was made, authorizing the Jews to defend themselves on the day of the intended massacre. They did so, and seventy-five thousand enemies of the Jews fell, among them ten of the sons of Haman. Not content with this slaughter,

Esther asked that on the following day the Jews in the royal city be allowed another carnival of slaughter, and that the bodies of Haman's sons be hanged. This request was granted; and in commemoration of the event, the feast of Purim, or lots, was instituted. A few comments will be made on some of the elements of this story, in order to throw light on the character of Esther.

It would, perhaps, be unfair to criticise her marriage to a king not of her own race, although the laws and traditions of the Jews in this regard were very strict. So strict were they, indeed, that among those who returned to Jerusalem a few years after Esther's time, the Jews who had married strange wives were forced to give them up, by order of Ezra and Nehemiah. Esther's excuse was twofold. In the first place Mordecai desired her advancement to the position, and his authority over her as her adopted father was absolute. Secondly, her position would enable her to be of great assistance to the people. Herein was her justification.

Some have declared that she manifested a degree of unpardonable timidity and a lack of true devotion to the Jews, when she trembled and hesitated at the thought of risking her own life in approaching the king's presence unannounced, to ask for the safety of her kinsfolk. Their ground for this accusation against her, is the fact that according to the story as told in the Bible, it was

almost necessary for Mordecai to command her, under a curse, to do her duty.

But this censure is too severe. Womanly fear overcame her for a short time, but it was transitory. Her faith rose to the occasion, and she sent out the simple, fervent request that all the Jews fast three days and nights with her and her maidens, that her going into the presence of the king might be without harm to her and her people; adding the simple and devoted words, "If I perish, I perish."

Esther proved herself a natural diplomat in the fact that she did not at once denounce Haman and bring on a crisis before the time was ripe. Her request that the king and Haman come to a banquet which she had prepared, threw the scheming nobleman off his guard, and flattered him into supposing her his friend. She then worked on the sympathy of the king, so that when the time was ripe for the disclosure of Haman's villany, his downfall was certain and rapid.

The counterplot for the destruction of all Persians who should take part in the attempted slaughter of the Jews, saved Esther's people from utter annihilation throughout the Persian empire. But she ought to have been satisfied with one day of bloodshed, by which her enemies were entirely discomfited and rendered helpless. She asked, however, that the Jews in the royal city Shushan (or Susa) be allowed another day on which to slay their enemies. The king granted

her request, and three hundred more of the Persians were slain. She asked, further, that the bodies of Haman's ten sons, who had been slain on the first day, be hanged on a gallows, as a further mark of dishonor. This request was also granted.

At this distance from the time and circumstances, we are inclined to judge Esther harshly for this apparently unnecessary revenge. Was it not enough that Haman had been hanged? that Mordecai had been advanced to the position of prime minister? that she and her people had been spared? that seventy-five thousand of her enemies had been destroyed? Was it now necessary for her to ask for the slaughter of three hundred others, who could not possibly harm her or her people? or that the sons of Haman, already dead, should be further dishonored by their bodies being hanged? Esther would have appeared more womanly to us if she had not made these two requests.

Yet of her deserving a prominent place as one of the heroines of the Bible, there is not the least shadow of a doubt. It required great strength of character and sublime faith in God to enable her to brave the vengeful spite of Haman, the hatred of the Persians for the Jews, and the danger of a personal appeal to the king in behalf of her doomed people. At the outset, everything was apparently against her. Yet so strong in faith and courage was she and so skilful in diplomacy, that she was able with the assistance of Mordecai to turn the most adverse circumstances to the good

of her people. There is no wonder then that her name and her fame are common among the Jews of all ages; and that parents and writers among them have been proud to name their daughters and heroines Esther.



XV. THE HEROINE OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

One of the most widely misunderstood and variously interpreted books of the Bible is the book of Canticles, or the Song of Solomon. It is not my purpose here to name and explain all these varied interpretations, but merely to name the one which most modern commentators accept, and base this treatise upon it.

This book is now quite generally looked upon as a sort of drama, or poetic story, written by an unknown poet of the northern kingdom, some two centuries after Solomon's time. It is supposed that the book includes three characters, besides a chorus. This chorus is composed of the women of Solomon's court. The three characters are a young maiden of the northern kingdom, her lover, and Solomon. The girl is the heroine, the lover the hero, and Solomon the villain.

The plot of the poem is simple. The maiden and her lover are betrothed. He is a shepherd on the mountains of Lebanon. She has been mistreated by her half-brothers, and forced to do such menial labor as vine-dressing, etc. While engaged

in this occupation, she is seen by the ladies of Solomon's court, as they are making a tour of the north with him. Struck with her great beauty, they report her to him, and together they try to induce her to go with them to Solomon's harem and become an inmate of it. In glowing terms they describe the magnificence of his court. They praise her beauty with the hope of winning her through flattery. At length, we presume against her will, she is taken to Jerusalem, and there the inducements are increased, but all in vain. She remains true to her absent lover, and the cajolery and threats of Solomon are alike unavailing.

Her faithfulness to her lover is sublime, and she will allow nothing to alter her determination to be true to him. At last her devotion is rewarded, and she is allowed to depart to her rural home, where her lover meets her; and together they sing the marriage song, which for truth, strength, and beauty of imagery, stands as a monument in the language:

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart,
As a seal upon thine arm;
For love is strong as death;
Jealousy is cruel as the grave;
The coals thereof are coals of fire,
A most vehement flame.

"Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it;
If a man would offer all the substance of his house,
For a woman's love,
It would utterly be contemned."

“Love must be given; it cannot be bought.” Solomon tried, according to the poem, to purchase the love of a poor country maiden by offering her all the comforts and luxuries of his house, and he and his wealth were utterly contemned. And nothing but contempt belongs to the man who would attempt to buy, or the woman who would sell, even the symbols of love, for money.

The heroine of the Song of Solomon is an imaginary woman; her story, with its scenes and incidents, is imaginary; but the moral of the story and the character of its heroine are worthy of eternal preservation. As long as woman's faith and loyalty are admirable, as long as the wiles of wealth or power are used to lure her from the path of virtue and devotion, as long as love is weighed by the mercenary in the scales with wealth—so long will the heroine of the Song of Solomon stand forth as one who proved her truth, resisted blandishment, and received her reward in the wealth of a husband's love. Hence we cannot admire too much the woman here portrayed; and as all good poetry, fiction, and drama are useful, not only for their inherent beauty, but for the lessons they teach, we may gain from this drama of human life its appropriate lesson.

Although I disagree in many particulars with the Bible interpretations made by Dr. Lyman Abbott, of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, I cannot forbear quoting here the essence of what he says on this beautiful book:

“To a true woman no wealth is of worth to be compared for a moment with the love of a true heart. This is the lesson of the Song of Songs.

* * * Are we sure, as we look at life in America, that there is no need to be taught this lesson in our own world? Is marriage a la mode unknown with us? Are there no parents who think a good match for the daughter is a match to a wealthy suitor or a noble one? Are there no men and women in America who weigh love over against houses and lands, and call love the lighter weight of the two? Are there no women who find themselves distraught between the plea of ambition and the plea of love, and know not which road to take? If “love in a cottage” has been often sung, it has often also been scorned and scoffed at by the cynic. It may be said that literature is full of this story, that it is the common plot of the ordinary novel, that again and again through fiction, ambition and love are put in contrast, and love exalted—that is true; but what will you say of the first writer who told the story of the battle between love and ambition and put love first? I doubt whether there can be found anywhere in ancient literature a story of pure womanly love antedating the Song of Songs. This sweet song of woman’s fidelity is the spring out of which all the dramas of literature that have glorified pure, simple, earnest, honest, faithful love, have, as it were, come forth.

“I cannot but think that the lesson of this drama needs especial emphasis in our time and

in our country. The higher education and the larger life of woman in our day bring temptation—higher education and larger life always bring temptation. Woman entering into literature, into business, into politics, is beckoned by ambition which before came not within her horizon. Now and again in public addresses the home is even scoffed at, the husband treated as a slaveocrat, love laughed out of court, and the notion sedulously advocated that a woman advances her position and rises into a larger life if she turns from wifehood and motherhood and humble love to the forum, the lecture room, the business office. I am not arguing that she should not go into business; I am not arguing that she should not be lawyer, doctor, minister, or politician; I certainly am not arguing that the doors should be shut and she refused permission to open them. But this I do say: It is impossible to have those doors open, to have that larger life given, to have all the motive powers and the intellectual powers quickened by a broader and greater education— it is impossible in the rush and hurry and turmoil of our American life to bring about all this and not subject woman to the temptation to take ambition as her object in place of love. Against every notion, come how it may and whence it may, that it is a nobler thing to be in business or in a profession or in politics or in literature or on the platform than it is to love with fidelity one man, to be his companion, consecrated to him, joining her love with his, I raise

my voice, here and everywhere, and thank God for the Song of Songs, which teaches us that all the trappings and attractions, all the glory and the power, all the accoutrements and the elements that beckon to the court are as nothing compared with the sweet sacredness of humble, quiet love.

“In this Song of Songs I, too, see an allegory, as in marriage I see a symbol. In some true sense to every one of us, man or woman, these two beckoning spirits come. As Hercules was invited in one direction by pleasure and in the other by wisdom, so every one of us is called in one direction by love and in the other direction by ambition; and I take as the great and final message of the Song of Songs, this: No ambition can take the place of love; the man or woman who has the great possessions, the fine equipage, the royal apparel, fame, social splendor, and no love, is to be pitied. But the man and woman who have in their hearts faithful, loyal, true love one for the other, though their home be a cottage with a sanded floor, though their only equipage be the baby carriage, though their only literature be the daily press, though their only trappings be clothes twice turned and turned again, need pity of none. For if a man would offer all his houses and all his substance instead of love, he should be scorned with a great scorn.”

WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I. THE VIRGIN MARY.

There is an interval of more than four centuries between the close of the Old Testament history and the opening of the New. During that time the world passed through some very stirring scenes. The Persian empire fell before the Macedonian warrior-king, Alexander the Great. Out of the ruins of his colossal empire, two powers arose, Syria and Egypt. These two struggled for the mastery, and Palestine was their battlefield. The Jews were led first to one side of the conflict, then to the other, until Judea became a nation of mercenary soldiers, selling their swords to the highest bidder in gold or power. Then the Jewish nation itself was divided into two parties, headed respectively by the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and these fought a civil war which threatened for a time the very existence of the nation.

But another power, stronger than any which

had preceded it, was advancing from the west. Rome had conquered southern Europe and northern Africa, and was now pouring her legions into western Asia. As the great Roman general Pompey advanced into Palestine at the head of these legions, and saw the furious struggle of Jew against Jew, he took the side of the Pharisees, ended the struggle, put the province of Judea under Roman rule—and Jewish independence vanished forever. Soon Herod, the great descendant of Edom (Esau) won the favor of Jews and Romans, and became king, or governor, of Judea, with Roman sanction. It is in the last year of his reign that the story of the New Testament opens.

The story commences with two women, the mothers respectively of Jesus and John the Baptist. The little village of Nazareth lay nestling in the northern hills, in the despised province of Galilee. It was inhabited by a few humble peasants, of various tribes, many of whom poverty or obscurity had forced away from their native cities in richer and more populous Judea. These were looked down upon and despised by the wealthy aristocrats of the south, and this contempt had passed into a proverb, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Among these poor and humble ones were some of the royal tribe of Judah, who had moved away from the city of David (Bethlehem) and taken up their residence in Nazareth. A woman, or rather a girl of this royal house, was betrothed, but not

married, to an elderly relative, the carpenter Joseph. This was the Virgin Mary. All unconscious both of the royal blood which coursed through her veins and of the wonderful and blessed destiny before her, she performed cheerfully and well the duties of her humble life, preparing herself for her expected dignity as a Jewish matron—a wife and mother.

But an unexpected dignity, an unlooked-for honor, was in store for her. She was to be known to future generations, not as the wife of the carpenter, the mother of Joseph's children, but as the virgin Madonna, the mother of the Son of God. The incident of the annunciation, when this great fact was made known to her, is one of the most touching and beautiful in all Scripture. The manifestation of the Angel Gabriel to her; his salutation, "Hail, thou blessed among women;" her wondering surprise; his announcement of her blessed privilege; these form a most attractive and instructive historical picture. But the climax of it is reached in the song of praise into which she bursts forth on the occasion of her visit to Elizabeth; a triumphal song like unto the one in which Hannah blessed the name of God for the gift of the infant Samuel.

But the perplexity of the good, plodding Joseph, when the whisperings of gossips made known Mary's condition to him, was great indeed. She was to him, in effect, a wife. True, the marriage had not been celebrated, but the betrothal

made her his. Hence he considered a divorce necessary. There were two ways in which ante-nuptial impurity could be punished: first, by a public divorce, attended by all the scorn and contempt of such a proceeding, and followed, if desired, by the stoning to death of the guilty woman; second, a private divorce, without scandal or further punishment. In the goodness and honesty of his soul, Joseph had determined upon the latter course. But the Angel Gabriel appeared to him also, and told him not to be afraid to take Mary to wife; for her condition was a cause of honor and rejoicing, not shame and mourning. The son she was to bear was holy, the Son of God.

The proclamation that all the Jews were to go to their own cities to be taxed, was made just after Joseph had been assured of Mary's chastity and had taken her to wife. They prepared for the journey, and soon approached their tribal city, Bethlehem. At this point I desire to insert Lew Wallace's description of this pure, beautiful woman. It is taken from his "Ben Hur," and is a description of Mary just before she reached the Khan, or stable, where her babe was born:

"She was not more than fifteen. Her form, voice, and manner belonged to the period of transition from girlhood. Her face was perfectly oval, her complexion more pale than fair. The nose was faultless; the lips, slightly parted, were full and ripe, giving to the lines of the mouth warmth, tenderness, and trust; the eyes were blue and

large, and shaded by drooping lids and long lashes; and, in harmony with all, a flood of golden hair, in the style permitted to Jewish brides, fell unconfined down her back to the pillion on which she sat. The throat and neck had the downy softness sometimes seen, which leaves the artist in doubt whether it is an effect of contour or color. To these charms of feature and person were added others more indefinable—an air of purity which only the soul can impart, and of abstraction natural to such as think much of things impalpable. Often, with trembling lips, she raised her eyes to heaven, itself not more deeply blue; often she crossed her hands upon her breast, as in adoration and prayer; often she raised her head like one listening eagerly for a calling voice. Now and then, midst his slow utterances, Joseph turned to look at her, and catching the expression kindling her face as with light, forgot his theme, and with bowed head, wondering, plodded on."

Though this description is only a fanciful one, based on tradition and the imagination of artists, yet it coincides with our poetic ideal of the person of the Madonna, and with the engraving which forms the frontispiece to this volume. It may be considered true and accurate, for it declares her to have been both pure and beautiful.

It will not be necessary here to go into all the details of the birth and early childhood of the Messiah, the story is so familiar. It will be my aim merely to mention the circumstances which

had a striking effect on the young mind of Mary, in preparing her for the exquisite joys and keen sorrows of her life as the mother of the Christ. The first of these was the visit to her humble bed of the shepherds of Bethlehem, who had been told of the divine birth by the angels in their sublime song of "*Gloria Deo in excelsis.*" As she saw these humble but devout men, kneeling before her babe and offering adoration to him, an elevation of soul must have been hers, mingled with a sense of wonder that her babe should be so honored.

I have been attracted and thrilled by the remarkable scene which took place in the temple at Jerusalem, when Mary presented Jesus (her first-born) to the Lord, and offered up a sacrifice for him. There stood the old servant of the Lord, Simeon, waiting and longing for the fulfillment of the promise which had been made to him, that before he died he should see the Lord's Christ. As Joseph and Mary brought in the child, Simeon received him from them and blessed God and said:

"Now lettest thou thy servant depart O Lord,
According to thy word, in peace;
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples.
A light for revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of thy people, Israel."

But the picture was not all brightness. The old man saw suffering for Jesus and sorrow for Mary. And as husband and wife wondered at the

things he had said about the babe, he added that the child should stand for the falling as well as the rising of many in Israel; that as a sign he should be spoken against; and then he added the sorrowful and prophetic words to Mary, "Yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul, also." How well it was that this saying and its full meaning remained hidden from Mary; that she merely pondered over it; that its meaning was revealed to her only by gradual steps. By Christ's mystic words when a child, "Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" by his complete separation at the age of thirty from the home of his childhood; by his choosing as his mother, brother, and sisters, those who did his Father's will, in preference to his own relatives; by his violent rejection from Nazareth; by his suffering of unrelenting persecution; by his betrayal, trial, and death. Had all this knowledge been revealed to Mary at once by the prophetic words of Simeon, it might have been more than her mother-love could endure. How well it is, indeed, that all our trials are revealed to us gradually, as Mary's were to her.

The words of Anna the prophetess on this occasion were full of prophetic inspiration; though they are not recorded. But they must have carried with them the assurance that this was indeed the Christ.

The incident of the visit of the wise men, or magi, and their adoration of the babe, must have im-

pressed her even more than the visit of the shepherds. Many fanciful stories are told of this visit, among them this : That on a certain night, Balthasar, an Egyptian, Melchior, a Hindoo, and Gaspar, a Greek, met in the desert, being attracted thither by a new and wonderful star, which they knew betokened the birth of the King of the Jews. From that central point they made their way, still under the guidance of the star, toward the place where Mary and her babe were.

So much for the fanciful part of the story. Of a truth, some wise men were attracted by the wonderfully luminous star, and went to Judea to worship the babe, and bestow gifts upon him. Not knowing just where to go, they made inquiry at Jerusalem of Herod and his officers. Being very desirous himself of finding this new king of the Jews, and that for no good purpose, Herod cunningly inquired of the Jewish priests where it was expected the king would be born. For two reasons, Bethlehem was pointed out: first, because it was the home of David, the founder of the royal line; second, because of the following prophecy recorded in Micah: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Thereupon, Herod imparted this information to the wise men, and they went on their way, carrying with them Herod's injunction to return to him with information as to the child's dwelling-place, that he

also might go and worship the newborn King. The feelings and thoughts of Mary can not be imagined when she saw these wise and learned men bow before the babe, doing reverence to him, and offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; the first being thought by some to be a symbol of his kingship; the second, of his purifying power; the third, of his authority as the Savior.

No less wonderful was the dream-warning given to the magi, not to return to Jerusalem and inform Herod of the whereabouts of the child. Following soon after came the warning to Joseph to flee with Mary and Jesus into Egypt, to escape the slaughter which Herod, in his wrath at being deceived by the magi, decreed upon all the infants in Bethlehem under two years. These miraculous events were surely sufficient to make a deep and lasting impression on Mary's mind, and to give to her the thorough conviction that no ordinary being was entrusted to her watchcare.

Mary's stay in Egypt with her child was brief, lasting somewhat less than a year, for, as before stated, the year of Jesus' birth was the year of Herod's death. Therefore when Herod, the one whom Mary and Joseph had cause to fear, was dead, and they heard that Antipas, one whom they needed to fear but little, ruled in Galilee, while Archelaus, as cruel as Herod, ruled in Judea, they thought it safe to live in Galilee with the child. Accordingly they returned to their old home at Nazareth.

Regarding the number of children slain on this occasion, there has been a great deal of controversy. Voltaire, for the purpose of throwing discredit on the story, and making it appear absurd, places the number at 15,000! But as the entire population of Bethlehem was probably not more than 2,000, and perhaps not nearly so many, forty or fifty would be an ample estimate. By some authorities the number has been placed at fifteen. This crime sinks into insignificance when compared with some others committed by Herod, and therefore none of Herod's historians refers to it. That he committed the deed, however, there is no doubt. The news of this slaughter must have been the commencement of the piercing of the sword through Mary's soul.

In the little town of Nazareth, Mary attended to the wants and watched the growth of the child Jesus, developing, no doubt, in her own character and strength as a mother in Israel. The influences that surrounded her here were apparently of such a nature as to arouse within her soul exceptional graces. M. Renan thus refers to the village of Nazareth in connection with its influence on Mary's life: "Even in our days Nazareth is a delightful sojourn, the only place, perhaps, in Palestine where the soul feels a little relieved of the burden which weighs upon it in the midst of this unequalled desolation. The people are friendly and good-natured; the gardens are fresh and green. Antonius Martyr, at the end of the sixth

century, draws an enchanting picture of the fertility of the environs, which he compares to paradise. Some valleys on the western side fully justify his description. The fountain, about which the life and gaiety of the little town centered, has been destroyed; its broken channels now give but a turbid water. But the beauty of the women who gathered there at night—this beauty which was already remarked in the sixth century, and in which was seen the gift of the Virgin Mary, has been surprisingly well preserved. It is the Syrian type, in all its languishing grace. There is no doubt that Mary was there nearly every day, and took her place, with her urn upon her shoulder, in the same line with her unremembered country-women. Antonius Martyr remarks that the Jewish women, elsewhere disdainful to Christians, are here full of affability. Even at this day religious animosities are less intense at Nazareth than elsewhere."

Of this good-nature, affability, and quiet beauty, Mary doubtless partook in full measure. The same thoughtful quietude she must have impressed upon her children. For there appears every evidence that a number of children were born to her after her marriage to Joseph, despite the attempts of many to show that she was the mother of Jesus only. It has never seemed clear to me how men can think that her honor as a mother would be increased by the thought that Jesus was her only child. Besides, every reasonable supposition would be in favor of her bearing a

number of children, each one of them being an additional source of pride and honor. The brethren of Jesus are clearly designated by their names, James and Joses and Simon and Judas; and Matthew also refers to his sisters.

But Mary soon found that Jesus was her son in a different sense than were her other children. The first recorded instance of the opening of this truth to her mind, is in the incident which occurred at Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old—the age when, according to Jewish ideas, the child became a youth. Accompanying Joseph and Mary to the feast of the passover, he remained in the temple,—apparently forgetful of all human relationships—talking with doctors and rabbis about the wonderful things of God—while his earthly guardians were plodding toward their home. Missing him, they returned to the city, and found him after a search. He was still in the temple—still asking and answering questions of wonderful depth and significance.

Mary's words to him were almost in the nature of a rebuke. She regarded him as a son that had caused his parents needless anxiety. "Son," said she, "why have you dealt so with us? Behold, your father and I have sought you sorrowing." What effect his words produced upon her—whether she was sorrowful that the expected separation had commenced, or proud that he now began to assert his sonship to God—we do not know. But there is no mistaking their import. "How is

it you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" No longer the "your father and I" of Mary's expression, but the "My Father" of his own, was to be the claimant and guide of Jesus' love and acts. Mary began to see that in the case of this boy, she was the mother, not of *her* son, but of the Son of God. This was the first step in the great separation. Although he returned with them to Nazareth, and for eighteen years more remained subject to their will, he must have seemed different to them from that time on. For we are told that Mary pondered over this saying of his, as she did over the miraculous events of his birth and infancy.

Of this striking incident, Stier says: "Solitary floweret out of the wonderfully enclosed garden of thirty years, plucked precisely there, where the swollen bud, at a distinctive crisis, burst into flower. To mark that is assuredly the design and the meaning of this record. The *child* Jesus sought to know himself, and his whole life of childhood was this seeking."

The following eighteen years of the life of Mary and her son are buried in obscurity. That she took cheerfully upon herself the added cares of maternity, as became a Jewish matron, we have no doubt. Nor do we doubt that her life was a purely domestic one, confined to the narrow limits of Nazareth and the few surrounding villages, yet broad enough to satisfy all the demands of her nature and mission. For hers was essentially a home

life—her glory and satisfaction were to come through the greatness of her sons and not through her own achievements.

Mgr. Bernard O'Reilly says of this home-life of Mary: "Is she, then, less admirable, because her life in Nazareth is merged in that of her son? Let every mother and daughter who shall read these pages, and take time to ponder what is here intended to be taught, lay this truth to heart,—that the future of the world, the greatness and happiness of every country, depend on the growth of true manhood within the obscurity and hallowed quiet of the Christian home. Every natural and supernatural virtue and excellence that goes to make up the true man in the home of the laborer and mechanic, as well as in that of the rich, the learned, the noble, and the great, is a fruit of the mother's sowing and ripening. We, in our day and generation, are impatient of home restraints, and slow, progressive culture; one such son as David or Samuel is glory enough for any mother. When Christ left his loved retirement in Nazareth, and filled Judea with his name, it was said of him, 'He hath done all things well.' What mother could desire sweeter praise for her life-labors, or a more complete eulogy on her dear ones? And since Christ's life and example have become an influence of every day and moment during these past eighteen hundred years, how many mothers have found light and strength in the virtues that shine forth to the attentive eye within that lowly abode of Mary at Nazareth!"

The next incident in connection with which Mary is mentioned, is the performing of Christ's first miracle. Jesus had left his home at thirty years of age, and had gone down to the valley of the Jordan to meet John and be baptized by him. The circumstances of the leave-taking with his mother are not given to us. After his baptism, temptation, and John's acknowledgment of him as the Christ, he is supposed to have returned to Nazareth, followed by some of John's former disciples, Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip. There he learned that his mother had gone over to the little village of Cana, to attend a marriage feast. Thither he went with his disciples. There he found his mother, and joined her as one of the guests at the feast.

That Mary was on terms of intimate friendship with the bride and the groom, seems to be evidenced by the important part she took in the interesting event. Before the feast was finished, the wine was exhausted. It may have been poverty, or it may have been lack of the opportunity to purchase more wine, that prevented the groom from replenishing the jars. And among the orientals, a man who, at his wedding, failed to supply enough wine for the long-continued and copious drinking of his guests, was looked upon somewhat in the light of a disgraced man.

With her quick and sympathetic mind, Mary doubtless perceived how evil an effect would thus be produced on the future of her friend, the bride-

groom, and she was determined that, if possible, the failing of the wine should be kept from the knowledge of the guests. Deems says, "Jesus had heretofore performed no miracle. That we are expressly told by the historian John (2:11), who thus sets aside all those grotesque and monstrous things which are related of Jesus in the apocryphal books. But Mary knew his miraculous conception and the marvels attending his birth. She had watched his growth in wisdom and power, and although she had never witnessed a miracle, she had always found him a wise adviser in times of domestic emergencies. How far he had communicated to her his views of his mission we cannot know. They must have had long conversations and deep communings about himself; and if he had never given her any hints about his Messiahship, the Jewish woman had Jewish hopes in her heart, and she connected them with the sacred secrets of his birth, and brooded over them with her maternal love. There is a great probability that the disciples who were with Jesus told her how they had come to form that brotherhood, on the ground of the Baptist John's having proclaimed him as the Messiah. The Baptist was the highest authority then. So now Mary received him, after his absence, in the double character of son and Messiah. And she knew that the Messiah was to work miracles.

"The hour seemed to have arrived; the wine failed. She spoke to Jesus, very delicately, mere-

ly informing him of the fact. It was very natural."

There is no doubt that in her giving the information to Jesus, of the failing of the wine, there was at least an implied request that he work a miracle to supply the lack. At least, Jesus seems to have interpreted it so. His reply to her, though it seems harsh to us, was not so. The term "Woman," among the Hebrews, was a title of the very greatest respect,—and why should it not be so everywhere? His question, "What have I to do with thee?" has been variously interpreted. I like to regard it as a mild and loving form of rebuke; announcing to her the fact that thereafter he was under the guidance, and must obey the behests, of his Father, to whom she must relinquish him. That whenever his "hour should come" to begin the working of miracles, he would recognize it as coming from God, and would commence the work. But that even she, his mother, was not possessed of the authority to command him in a matter so important and holy.

To me there appears no difficulty in the interpretation of the sentence, "Mine hour is not yet come." I do not see the need of Gregory's changing it into a question, "Has not my hour come?" It appears simply to mean that not by any earthly prompting was he to know the coming of the time of showing his Godly power—that knowledge must come from God alone.

But that his reply to her request did not contain a refusal, is clear from what follows. Mary

seems to have known that his sympathetic heart would not permit him to be indifferent to the sufferings of his mother's friend—his own disciple, indeed, if the idea of Bernard be correct, that the bridegroom was none other than Nathanael, afterwards one of Christ's Apostles. Therefore, Mary turned to the servants and said, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

The six stone waterpots were filled with water, the whole amount being about one hundred and thirty-three gallons. When this was dipped out and carried to the guest who acted as master of ceremonies, he pronounced it very much better wine than had been served in the beginning of the feast.

The miracle or the marriage is not so much the object of our attention here, as is the part taken in the affair by Mary, and the new relationship now apparently formed between her and her son. Her kind, sympathetic, motherly feeling has already been referred to as prompting her to remove the embarrassment of the groom by looking after the supplying of the needed wine. She knew what it was to suffer the humiliation of poverty, and her sympathy went out to the embarrassed host and hostess. Here was her son, now in the work of his Messiahship, and, she doubtless believed, full of miraculous power. As a Jewess, she was not ignorant or skeptical of miracles. The history of her people had been full of them. Therefore, her faith and her sympathy went together,

and prompted her to ask the favor of Jesus. But he desired to impress upon her affectionate mind the fact that it *was* the Messiah, rather than her son, whom she addressed. Hence his kind, dignified reply, which I have never been able to interpret except as a mild reproof for her trying to direct him in the work which was distinctly his Father's.

But there is evidence of the fact, before referred to, that she did not yet fully understand her separation from parental relationship with him. This is shown in her accompanying him and his disciples to Capernaum, where he remained for a short time working miracles. His departure for Jerusalem, to attend the Passover, necessitated his leaving her; and she is next mentioned in connection with an event which must have been very painful to her and to Jesus. He had been rejected at his home, Nazareth, and an attempt made by his townspeople to put him to death. He therefore went away from Nazareth, and took up his labors in other parts of Galilee, establishing his home at Capernaum, probably with his disciple, Peter.

His preaching of a strange doctrine and performance of many miracles created a great stir throughout Galilee, and brought him into considerable notoriety. He had a number of conflicts of opinion with the Pharisees and others, in which they were put to the worse, and they were full of enmity and the spirit of falsehood

toward him. Multitudes followed him from place to place, and in talking to them, healing them of infirmities, and ministering to them, he was kept so busily occupied that proper rest and recreation were impossible. No doubt the threatened loss of health and reputation alarmed his mother and her other sons. They determined, therefore, to recall him from what they considered a ruinous course of conduct, before it should be too late.

They came to him as he was in the synagogue, probably at Capernaum, engaged in a vehement controversy with the Pharisees. Already some of his friends had tried to dissuade him from the course he was pursuing, and had failed. His mother and brethren were determined to recall him to a proper sense of respectability, and to take him home. For this purpose they came to the door of the synagogue, and sent a messenger to him, announcing their presence. It appears that they did not desire to remonstrate with him in the public assembly; or probably they were unable to get to him, on account of the crowd.

Whether Jesus was surprised or grieved at this attempt to draw him from his divine mission, we do not know. Apparently, he did not desire to meet his mother and brothers just then. Nor did he desire to rebuke them directly before the multitude. He knew that they could not be expected to understand him and his great mission perfectly. His mother in her loving weakness, and his brothers in their lack of faith in him, were still

objects of his sympathy and affection. Therefore, he gently ignored their message, preferring that his rebuke be an indirect one. "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" said he to the one who had brought him the request. Then turning to the multitude, he continued: "Behold my mother, and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Could separation from earthly relatives be more complete? No longer the ties of flesh but of spirit were to be regarded by him. No longer was he only the son of Mary and the brother of her other children; he was son and brother to all who had been, or in the future should be, born of the Spirit in the covenant of the Son of God. A new brotherhood had been formed, and he was its founder and chief member. Admission to it was not through birth, or wealth, or genius, or greatness, but through obedience to the requirements of the Gospel of Christ. Thus did Jesus gently and considerately, but unmistakably, impress upon Mary the fact of his further separation from her.

Deems says of this passage: "Whoever lovingly obeys God is Jesus' brother; the same spirit animates both. If his own mother did not obey God, Jesus is ready to disown the relationship. If the poorest woman in the world—such as the poor barbarian woman in Africa, who gave water to Mungo Park, and sang lullabies to him in his sickness and solitude—shall only lovingly obey God,

Jesus is ready to recognize her as sister or mother. It is a sublimely wide and deep saying!"

During the stirring and dramatic scenes of the last year of Jesus' life, Mary disappears from view, to reappear only at the time of his crucifixion. Why she happened to be in Jerusalem at that time, we do not know, unless it was because of the Passover. Apparently her sons were at the feast also, but whether or not they witnessed the death of Christ we are not informed.

We are not told when Mary first appeared on the fatal scene. She is first mentioned, however, at the time of the death of her son. Some of the evangelists speak of her and some other women as "standing a long way off" from the cross and witnessing the last sad scene. It remained, however, for John, the one apostle who witnessed the crucifixion of Christ from a point near the cross, to record the pathetic incident in which Mary participated. She had stood near the cross, her mother-heart sickening at the great agony Jesus was enduring, and his sympathy went out to her. He desired that she be spared the great trial of seeing him die. She was the last mortal being to whom his thoughts were given. As he saw her standing there leaning on the arm of the Apostle John, and silently weeping, he knew that her great need was a son to take the place which he had practically vacated three years before, but which he was now leaving entirely empty. Fixing his eyes in tender compas-

sion on the two; he said to Mary, "Woman, behold thy son;" and to John, "Behold thy mother." To the sensitive and sympathetic John this mere hint was sufficient. He rightly interpreted it into a wish that Mary be spared the pain of witnessing the closing scene of all. Gently and tenderly John led her away to his own home. With him she made her abode until her death.

There is something pathetic and beautiful in this incident. It was a recognition of the mother-love by him whose work had been such as to render him, for several years, almost an exile from that love. Yet he recognized its purity and strength, and hallowed it by making it the last tie that bound him to earth. Having made provision for his mother's residence with one who would be a tender guardian, he had no further earthly duty to perform. Surely no higher recognition of the sacred tie of motherhood—the acme of the development of true womanhood—can be thought of than this. And it came from a Jew, whose history is recorded in the book which some would say denies to woman her true station in the social order.

But little more is said of Mary in the Bible. It does not appear perfectly clear that she had the privilege of seeing Jesus after his resurrection. Two Marys, Magdalene and the wife of Cleophas, are mentioned as preparing spices to place with the body on the day after the Sabbath, and to these, as well as to Salome, mother of

James and John, Jesus appeared in his resurrected condition. But if his own mother is mentioned at all in this connection, it is only by John; and it is doubtful that the Mary he refers to is she.

The last mention of her is in the first chapter of Acts. She is there referred to as engaging in prayer with some of the other disciples. One writer has said: "This is the last view we have of her. Holy Scripture leaves her engaged in prayer. From this point forwards we know nothing of her."

Regarding the character of Mary, I cannot do better than quote the words of Dr. Smith: "The character of Mary is not drawn by any of the evangelists, but some of its lineaments are incidentally manifested in the fragmentary record which is given of her. It is clear from St. Luke's account, though without any such intimation we might rest assured of the fact, that her youth had been spent in the study of the Holy Scriptures, and that she had set before her the example of the holy women of the Old Testament, as her model. This would appear from the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46). Her faith and humility exhibit themselves in her immediate surrender of herself to the divine will, though ignorant how that will should be accomplished (Luke 1:38); her energy and earnestness, in her journey from Nazareth to Hebron (Luke 1:39); her happy thankfulness in her song of joy (Luke 1:48); her silent, musing thoughtfulness

in her pondering over the shepherds' visit (Luke 2: 19); and in her keeping her son's words in her heart (Luke 2: 51), though she could not fully understand their import. In a word, so far as Mary is portrayed to us in Scripture, she is, as we should have expected, the most tender, the most faithful, humble, patient, and loving of women, but a woman still."



II. ELIZABETH.

The history of the mother of John the Baptist is closely associated with that of the Virgin Mary. She was descended from Aaron, and was married to a priest of the same descent, named Zacharias. She had reached an advanced age at the time when mention is first made of her in Bible history, but she had remained childless. At that time barrenness was a particular source of grief to a Hebrew woman, for the reason that important events seemed to foreshadow the early birth of the Messiah; and it had always been the highest ambition of every Jewish wife to be the mother of the Christ. Hence her own statement that her childlessness was "a reproach to her."

It should be stated, also, that Elizabeth was related to Mary, although she lived in the hill country of Judea, while Mary lived in the northern province, at Nazareth. Thus the blood of the kingly line flowed in Elizabeth's veins, mingling with the blood of priestly descent.

In the providence of God, the time had come for the advent of the Messiah, and it was necessary

for one to go before him and prepare the way. It was fitting that his birth, as well as that of Jesus, already related, should be miraculous. Therefore this woman, Elizabeth, childless and old, was chosen to be his mother; just as Mary, young and a virgin, was chosen to be the mother of Messiah. John, or Jehoanan, as the Hebrew name is given, "the gracious gift of God," was to be a gift from Jehovah in very deed, even as Isaac, Samuel, and Jesus were such gifts.

This fact was shown to Zacharias in a most impressive way. He was in the temple performing his priestly duty of burning incense on the altar, when an angel appeared to him, announcing himself as Gabriel, and declaring that Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, should have a son. On account of her advanced age, her husband seems to have had the same skepticism regarding this announcement that Sarah felt when the promise of a son was made to her. But because he was a priest of God, and had seen the glorious apparition of an angel, his skepticism must be punished by some such sign as he had asked for. Therefore, he was told he should remain dumb until the birth of the child.

When he came out of the holy place, and joined the large congregation praying in the outer court, they perceived from his dumbness and his strange demeanor, that he had seen a vision. In their expectation of the Messiah, they naturally set great store by this incident, taking it as another indica-

tion of the miraculous advent of the Deliverer. This was just six months before the same angel appeared to the Virgin Mary and announced the birth of the infant Christ. By so much time only was the forerunner to precede the Messiah.

During this period Elizabeth went into retirement in the mountainous region of Carmel, and here Mary came to visit her just after the annunciation. To Elizabeth was given the privilege of being the first human being, after Mary, to whom the parentage and impending birth of Jesus were shown. The happiness of her own approaching maternity and the coming into her presence of the future mother of the Lord, produced in Elizabeth a peculiar excitement which impelled her to predict the birth of a son to Mary. Thus a sympathy and unity of feeling was established between the two women, which manifested itself in the song of praise they sang in the joy of their meeting—the *Magnificat*.

In due time the notable and miraculous birth occurred. As the relatives and friends of the aged mother assembled to congratulate her on the auspicious event, they suggested that the boy be named Zacharias, for his father. But Elizabeth astonished them all by saying, in the most positive way, "His name shall be John;" although there was no one of that name in her family or that of her husband. The miracle of the naming was made complete by Zacharias writing on his tablets, in answer to their inquiries, "His name shall be

John." This double acknowledgment by Zacharias and Elizabeth of the precious gift they had received, was looked upon by relatives and friends as a further miracle; and we are safe in supposing that not a few of them began to treasure the hope that he was the Christ. And to make a fitting climax to the striking scene, Zacharias was suddenly relieved of his dumbness, and burst forth into a beautiful, triumphant song of praise and gratitude.

This is the last mention of Elizabeth in the Gospels. The brevity of the account of her life is significant, in that it seems to emphasize the fact that her work, like that of her son, was merely preparatory. Though doubtless much pleasant and profitable intercourse occurred between her and her kinswoman Mary, and their children, giving joy and comfort to Elizabeth in her declining years, yet we are safe in venturing the opinion that the mother of John the Baptist was spared by previous death the knowledge of his self-sacrificing, abstemious life; his vast power in calling the Jews to repentance; his long, lonely imprisonment; his cruel death; the persecutions Jesus endured; and the manner of his death. But may we not think that in the spirit world, with the enlarged, refined knowledge there given her, she was permitted to see and understand the glory of Christ's atonement, the perfect redemption of the world, and the triumph of the resurrection, of which her son was doubtless one of the earliest fruits.

Elizabeth is a perfect type of the woman of

faith. Spiritual insight and foresight were strongly manifested by her. What mysterious power it was that enabled her to predict in unmistakable terms the birth of Messiah, on the occasion of Mary's visit to her, is best understood when we remember that her son John was to be filled with the Holy Ghost from before his birth. Under the influence of that Spirit, by which alone it is possible to say that Jesus is the Christ, the unborn babe and his expectant mother bore witness to the great truth of the advent of Messiah. The privilege of being the first mortal to know, through the promptings of the Spirit, of the coming of the Christ, was no small honor. On account of her perfect faith and spirituality, this honor was bestowed upon Elizabeth, and it may also be suggested that this knowledge was given her in order that she might impress it the more forcibly on her son, and prepare him to perform the better his great mission as the forerunner of Christ.

Perhaps another thought may be permitted. It is probable that her knowledge of the coming of the Son of God included a partial knowledge of the nature of his mission. It may have been permitted for her to know that his kingdom was not of this world,—his glory of heaven, not of earth. If this were so, we may suppose that she impressed upon her son the necessity of strict abstemiousness and self-denial in his life, to make him a fully acceptable forerunner of the self-sacrificing Jesus. And in the midst of the wide-

spread misunderstanding of the real nature of Christ's mission, and the terrible persecution which grew out of this misunderstanding, John doubtless stood well-nigh alone in the true knowledge of Christ's divinity; and this knowledge may well be looked upon as a precious heritage from his sainted mother, Elizabeth.

It was indeed a great privilege to prepare for so important a work the man of whom Jesus said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." To be his mother, his guardian, his guide, was an honor second only to that of being the mother of Messiah. "She (Elizabeth) had learned from the spirit of Christ within her, that only one other mother was more blessed in a son than herself. It had been given her to see face to face what Eve and Sarah and Rebekah and Rachael had yearned for, the Hope of Ages in a mother's arms on a mother's breast, and she died happy, as woman before her never died."



III. HERODIAS AND SALOME.

The two evil women of the New Testament, like their prototypes in the Old, were mother and daughter. The incident in connection with which they are mentioned, is so closely associated with the life of John the Baptist, that it is thought well to treat their work and character after Elizabeth's.

Herodias had been the wife of Philip, son of Herod the Great; but she had left him and was living in open sin with his half-brother, Herod Antipas. Salome was her daughter by Philip.

The mother was in many respects the counterpart of Jezebel. That she was unscrupulous and immoral is proved by her deserting her husband, and living in adultery with Herod. This fact also proves that she was selfishly ambitious; for her husband was living in political retirement in Rome; and becoming weary of so inactive a life, she willingly left him and joined in the intrigues of Herod. Like Jezebel, she was unwilling to trust her usefulness and happiness to the labors of the home; she must court the dangers and triumphs of public life.

In order more fully to understand the one incident of New Testament history in which Herodias and Salome figure, it is necessary to know that at this time John the Baptist was the idol of the common people among the Jews, who regarded him as a prophet, possessed of the spirit of Elias. Herod was very anxious to obtain and keep the good-will and the favorable opinion of the Jews. In the hope of accomplishing this, he tried to secure John's sanction of what he had done. But at the same time he thought it prudent to secure John in case his opinion was unfavorable. Accordingly, he invited John to his castle at Machaerus, and there put the question to him, if he approved of Herodias' course in leaving her husband and living with him. John could neither be bought nor forced against his conscience. His answer was bold and positive: "It is not lawful for thee to have her."

Herod saw that it would not do for John to spread this opinion among the Jews. Therefore he imprisoned the Baptist at Machaerus. It was the earnest desire of Herodias that he be put to death at once, but Herod was afraid to carry out her wishes. He rightly judged that John's continued absence from the people would cause his great influence gradually to decline. He was favored in this hope by the fact that Jesus was rapidly rising into favor, and John's disciples were flocking to him. He may have hoped, also, that John's strong will would be broken by his long, solitary

confinement, and he be induced to give his sanction to Herod's sin.

Though the first of these hopes was realized, he was disappointed in the second; for John, though broken in spirit by his loneliness, insisted that the course of Herod and Herodias was sinful. Therefore, Herodias determined on John's destruction; and she was unscrupulous enough to use her daughter Salome as a means of accomplishing this end. She knew that Herod was sensual and fond of wine. Therefore she used these two traits as a basis of her appeal to him. A magnificent feast was prepared by Herodias, and Herod and his friends were the guests.

With their senses inflamed by their excess in eating and drinking, they were ready to be worked upon by the scheming Herodias. She sent her daughter into the banquet-hall, in the guise of a dancing girl. She posed and danced before them in such graceful but suggestive attitudes, that they were wild with delight. Applause was showered upon her, and in the midst of the excitement of her triumph she put forth still greater efforts.

At length, Herod lost all self-control. Springing to his feet, drunken, half with wine and half with frenzy of passion, he swore with an oath that Salome could have any desire of her heart, even to the half of his kingdom. Salome went at once to her mother, to receive her prompting. One desire was uppermost in the mind of Herodias—dearer to her than any other. It was the death of

John the Baptist. Therefore Salome was sent back to Herod with a request that he fulfil his vow by giving her John the Baptist's head in a charger.

The request was so unexpected and so unpleasant to Herod, that he was sobered at once. The one thing that he had dreaded for so long had come. He had known for months that Herodias was determined to destroy John the Baptist, regardless of the consequences to Herod's rule. He knew that it mattered not to her how the Jews would take the murder of their favorite prophet, and what vengeance would come on Herod and his line. Her personal revenge was worth more to her than all the interests of his house. Therefore, he granted her request, though it was most distasteful to him. We presume that he was largely influenced in this decision by the thought of the effect which would be produced on those who were ear-witnesses of his vow, if he failed to keep it. "And the king was sorry; nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." He sent to the lonely prison of Machaerus, in the wilderness east of the Dead Sea, where John was imprisoned, and had him beheaded. The head was brought to Salome and taken by her to Herodias; and John's disciples took up his body and buried it.

The consequences of this cruel act, and of the other wrongs perpetrated by Herod and Herodias, were numerous and serious. Before eloping with this woman, Herod had married the daughter of a

king named Aretas. On account of the insult offered to this wife in his sin with Herodias, and also, Josephus says, on account of the murder of John the Baptist, Aretas led a large army against Herod and defeated him with a great slaughter.

Not content with the evil thus brought on her paramour, Herodias allowed her ambition to bring about his ruin. Her brother, Herod Agrippa, had been advanced by Caesar from a condition of extreme poverty to one of great power and wealth. She could not bear to see any one situated more fortunately than herself and her husband. Accordingly she persisted in urging Herod to go to Rome and gain from Caesar a similar dignity. He was afraid to do so, but she continually pleaded and threatened, until he was unable to withstand her importunities. Reluctantly he gave consent, and together they set out for Rome.

The result was most disastrous to them. Agrippa's officers followed them to Rome, and entered formal charges against them to Caesar. These charges were so well sustained, that instead of granting to Herod and Herodias added dignity, Caesar entered a decree of perpetual banishment against Herod. The unfortunate man was to pass this time of banishment in Lugdunum, Gaul, now known as Lyons, France. His estates, his kingdom, and all his property were ordered to be given to Agrippa. Hearing that Herodias was Agrippa's sister, Caesar offered her a certain amount of money, and freedom from the fate of Herod. But

in her reply to this offer was the only indication of nobility of which we have any account in her life. She said, according to Josephus, "Thou, indeed, O emperor, actest after a magnificent manner, and as becomes thyself, in what thou offerest me; but the kindness which I have for my husband hinders me from partaking of the favor of thy gift; for it is not just that I, who have been made a partner in his prosperity, should forsake him in his misfortunes." In anger the emperor sent her into exile with her husband.

In this tragic and disappointing outcome of their lives, these two must have seen a just retribution; and if Herodias was not entirely devoid of conscience, she recognized God's vengeance on her for the deeds of cruelty she had done or instigated, and for the immorality of her own life.

Contrast her life and its outcome with that of Elizabeth, the mother of the victim of her cruel rage. The latter found her highest ambition satisfied in the love of her husband and the birth and greatness of her son; Herodias was not satisfied with anything. Entering into the arena of political contests, and taking part in these with shameless zeal and selfishness, she experienced none of the happiness and satisfaction pertaining to true womanhood and its proper sphere. For this false, misleading ambition she sacrificed the honor of her first husband, and the position of the second; murdered an innocent man; and threw away woman's most precious possession. But the wine

of her ambition was in a tantalus-cup, and was spilled on the ground when she raised it to her lips. Instead of empire, exile was her lot; instead of peace, remorse; instead of ease, contention. Like her infamous prototype, Jezebel, she mingled tears of bitterness and remorse with the wine of her ambition.

Of her daughter but little is known. She was married to the tetrarch, Herod Philip, a half-brother of her mother's second husband; and afterwards to Aristobulus, king of Chalcis. No other incident of her life than the one already related is of interest to us.



IV. THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

One of the most interesting and instructive incidents in the life of Jesus is his conversation with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. Samaria lay between Judea and Galilee; and on the occasion in question Jesus was passing through that district on his way from the southern to the northern province. Sychar, or Shechem, the city near which the well was situated, was one of the most important places in Palestine, as well as one of the most beautiful. The scene which presented itself to the view of Jesus and his disciples when, in their weary journey northward, they came to Jacob's well and saw Shechem nestling between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, is thus described by Robinson: "The whole valley was filled with gardens of vegetables, and orchards of all kinds of fruits, watered by fountains, which burst forth in various parts, and flow westward in refreshing streams. It came upon us suddenly like a scene of fairy enchantment. We saw nothing to compare with it in all Palestine."

The place was the scene of some of the most important events in Jewish history: as the first

stop of Abraham in Canaan; Jacob's residence there on his return from Mesopotamia; the promulgation of the law in Joshua's time; the crowning of Rehoboam, Solomon's son; and the revolt of the ten tribes under Jeroboam. For a time it was the capital of the northern kingdom; and it was always a precious spot to the Samaritans. On the mountain near by, the Samaritan temple had been built as a rival to the Jewish temple at Jerusalem; and the Samaritans believed that only on that mountain could a descendant of Jacob worship Jehovah acceptably.

As Jesus and his disciples reached the well which Jacob had dug eighteen centuries before, and which was situated about a mile and a half east of the city, he sat down on the edge of the well while his followers went to the town to buy food. It was a place where one might naturally fall into musings on former and present conditions. No doubt Jesus thought of the past glories of Israel, now become but a reflection of the splendor of Rome. Perhaps he thought of the division and the late bitter enmity between the two kingdoms; now handed down as a heritage of hatred to the Jews of the south and the Samaritans of the north. And this train of thought would prepare him well for the remarkable conversation in which he was about to take part.

A woman from the city came to the well, with a pitcher on her shoulder. As she drew water, she was very much surprised at hearing the man who

sat there, apparently a Jew, ask her for a drink. She gave voice to her surprise, asking how he, a Jew, could ask a Samaritan for water, even a conversation between them being contrary to custom. His answer was a most skilful introduction of the subject nearest his heart,—his Messiahship and his mission to bring about the union and brotherhood of man. If she knew who it was that asked for drink, she would ask him for living water, drinking which she would never thirst again.

She did not catch the spiritual meaning of his words: but placing a physical interpretation on them, she asked him for that water, that she should no longer need to make the weary journey to the well and carry water to her home.

Here was his opportunity. He desired to teach her that the spiritual water of which he spoke, could be obtained only by acknowledgment and forsaking of sin. Therefore he brought her chief sin to her remembrance by telling her to bring her husband. She told him she had no husband. He quickly answered: "Thou hast well said, I have no husband:

"For thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly."

His words had a double effect. They brought her sin to her remembrance, and showed her his prophetic power. She was now ready to receive his spiritual message, and she opened the way for it by bringing up the subject of the division and

enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The answer of Jesus was a clear declaration of the true nature of the worship of God; and the fact that Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile could approach him in worship, whether on Mount Gerizim, on Mount Moriah, or in the remotest corner of the earth; the only requirement being that they approach him according to proper order and worship him in spirit and in truth. Thus did he proclaim the union and brotherhood of man, and God's universal Fatherhood.

One other fact he desired to impress upon her mind, and she opened the way for that by her next remark: "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things." Immediately he answered, "I that speak unto thee am he." He had finished his message to the woman of Samaria. In his short conversation with her he had taught her some of the profoundest truths regarding himself and his mission. He had shown her the necessity of repentance, and righteousness of life; had taught her the one true source of the soul's satisfaction; had impressed upon her mind the fact that God is the Father of all mankind; had asserted the fact of his own Messiahship; and had shown her the nature of the true worship of Jehovah. All these truths were imparted in one brief conversation with a woman, and she a sinful woman of a forbidden nation!

When his disciples returned, they were astonished at seeing him in conversation with a Samari-

tan, yet they dared not rebuke or question him. The woman went to the city with her wondering, wonderful message, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" The disciples asked him to eat; but still full of his spiritual thoughts, he told them that he had already eaten,—his food being the performance of his Father's will. He urged them to partake fully of the same food: for the harvest of souls was ready.

The truth of this remark was soon proved; for the Samaritans who had heard and believed the testimony of the woman, came out to him and besought him to remain among them and teach them. Accordingly, he sojourned with them two days; and many were converted through his teachings. Then they could say to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Such were the fruits of the missionary labor opened up in the Samaritan city: such the results of his faith-developing conversation with a woman. She is not mentioned again in the Bible, but tradition brings her name and later fame to us. According to this tradition, her name was Photina. She succeeded in converting both her sons, Joseph and Victor, as also her five sisters. With these she migrated to Northern Africa. Here, in the Neronian persecution about 60 A. D., they were all cast into prison at Carthage; and after repeated and terrible tortures, they were flayed alive, broken on the wheel, and beheaded.

V. MARY MAGDALENE.

Of the three Marys whose characters are fully delineated in the Gospels, none is the subject of greater controversy, or regarded with greater alternating contempt and admiration than Mary Magdalene. This is due to the fact that according to different readings of the same passages she was either an unfortunate woman, afflicted with illness in one of its worst forms, or a woman guilty of sin of the lowest and most degraded kind.

Her surname, "Magdalene," is supposed to have originated from the fact that she lived in the village of Magdala, which was probably on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The first mention made of her in the history occurs in the eighth chapter of Luke, and includes two facts: first, that Jesus had cast seven evil spirits out of her; second, that she was one of several women of comparative wealth who contributed to the support of Jesus and the Apostles. She is next referred to as one of the three women who stood "afar off," witnessing the crucifixion.

But her chief distinction comes from her connection with the resurrection of Jesus, and his ap-

pearance after that event. She and the other women, knowing that the burial of Jesus had been hasty, spent the evening of the Jewish Sabbath (corresponding with our Saturday) in preparing spices and other embalming materials, which they carried at daybreak the next morning to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. As they approached the sepulchre, Mary, in her eager love, arrived before the others and saw that the body was gone. It seems that she did not wait to investigate. She ran in all haste to the city, bearing to Peter and John the dreadful news that the body of Jesus had been stolen. Then, as they two ran toward the sepulchre, she returned thither also.

The other women, Mary (wife of Cleopas), Salome, and Joanna, had gone away from the tomb, and wandered probably into the fields. They had, however, received from the angels a direct statement that Jesus had risen from the dead, although they had not seen him. Peter and John came to the tomb, and looking in, beheld all the signs of the removal of the body. They also went away.

But Mary Magdalene could not be satisfied. Not even the assurance of the two angels that he was living, and must not be sought for among the dead, could quell her loving fears. She would be contented with nothing less than the sight of Jesus himself. She stood at the mouth of the sepulchre weeping, and passively looking for the body of her Lord,

A man approached her and asked the question, "Woman, why weepest thou?" It was such a natural question, asked in such a natural tone of voice, that she probably did not turn around to see who asked it. Her eyes were dimmed with tears, her heart was full of grief, her whole soul was absorbed in the thought of her dead Lord, and the indignities that she thought might be practiced on his body. Therefore, the question was of no interest to her;—her cause of grief was everything. "They have taken away the body of my Lord," said she, "and I know not where they have laid him." This sublime love must have been very touching and gratifying to him, even though he had risen from mortal to immortal associations. Therefore, it was with the old affection in his voice that he called her by the familiar name, "Mary!" The love, the tone, and the name revealed him to her. She turned to him, using the highest title a woman could bestow on a man, "Rabboni," "my beloved master." She advanced toward him—doubtless she would have embraced him—but he warned her: "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father." Why he should thus forbid her touching him, and then, but a few minutes afterward, permit the other three women named above, to embrace his feet and lavish their devotion upon him, we do not know. Some have supposed that it was because of the fact that the love of Mary Magdalene was of a more familiar, personal kind than that of the

other women; that she loved him as a man,—they as the Redeemer, the Messiah: that he objected, after his resurrection, to marks of merely personal affection, and accepted only the reverence bestowed upon him as the resurrected Christ. In this is also found by these commentators the reason for the omission of any mention of his appearance to his own mother, or to Mary or Martha of Bethany. It is thought that their veneration for him would not have been of such a nature as befitted the Messiah, who had conquered all things earthly, and become a celestial being.

It is unnecessary to accept this explanation, just as it is unnecessary to explain at all the apparent discrepancy in Jesus' actions. What occurred in his own personal experience during the short interval between these two appearances, we have no means of knowing. But it may be said in behalf of Mary Magdalene, that it was a most distinguished honor and privilege for her to be the first one to whom the resurrected Messiah appeared; even though this may be due to the fact that she was the first one to visit his sepulchre,—led thither by her great love and deep devotion for him.

Mary, as much as any other woman, is deserving of the beautiful eulogy written by the poet Barrett, and intended for application to all womankind:

“Not she with trait’rous kiss her Savior stung,
Not she denied him with unholy tongue.
She, while Apostles shrank, could danger brave,
Last at his cross, and earliest at his grave.”

The question now arises, was Mary Magdalene a reformed sinner? So deeply was the idea rooted in the mediaeval church, that she was the sinner who, in the house of the Pharisee, Simon, washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with precious ointment, that the name "Magdalene" came to be applied to all fallen women; and houses founded for their reformation were known as Magdalene hospitals. Thus the infamy which she was supposed to have deserved, has come down through the centuries inseparably attached to her name.

Did she deserve it? First, affirmatively. The reasons given for the opinion that she was a sinner, are, in the main, three in number. (1) That she had been possessed with evil spirits, and such possession is an indication of previous sinfulness. (2) Jesus delighted to associate with reformed sinners, preferring their repentant humility to the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. (3) That in some way an identity is supposed to exist between her and the sinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

The first of these reasons is strongly urged, supplemented by the idea that a person must have been sinful to deserve such a calamity as demoniacal possession. It is asserted that they who have lived lives of righteousness, are beyond the power of evil spirits to do them harm by entering into possession of their bodies; and that, therefore, no further evidence of Mary's sinful life is needed

than the fact of her having been thus possessed.

For the second contention, it is stated that her former sinfulness and her reformation of life, instead of being a hindrance to his friendship, would be a reason in favor of it. He came, in his own words, "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Therefore, if she was one of those sinners—one of the sick who needed a physician—he would heal her of her moral illness, and delight in her society after she was reformed. As a "friend of publicans and sinners," he would be a friend to the repentant Mary.

On the third subject nothing definite has been, or indeed can be, presented. The identity of Mary Magdalene with the sinner who, in the house of Simon, the Pharisee, washed the feet of Jesus, is based merely upon the supposition that Mary was a sinner, and that no other sinner would be as likely to do such a thing or to be mentioned, as she.

A quotation from the Catholic writer Mgr. O'Reilly, will show one phase of this argument: "The indignation with which some writers reject the notion of Mary Magdalene's being the same person as 'the sinner,' is founded on the assumption that the idea is degrading to the stainless purity of our Lord's mother and relatives, and to the respectability of the family of Lazarus. As if he had not come to seek and to raise up sinners! As if his blessed mother could look upon those on whom he had conferred

the first benefits of his redeeming and sanctifying grace, as unworthy of her companionship! Not a little of the Pharisaic contemptuousness of Simon and his friends often mixes with our own judgments."

The other side of the question is made up of the negative of the arguments named above. First, it is contended that being afflicted with evil spirits is not necessarily a proof of previous sinfulness;—that many excellent persons, through weakness, illness, and the designs of the evil one, have come under the influence of demoniacal spirits. This contention is supported by an appeal to historical instances of such possession, which it is not necessary to particularize here.

Secondly, it is stated that Jesus did not prefer the repentant sinners to the humble believers in him who had not given way to sin. Righteousness was not what he despised, but self-righteousness. That he associated on terms of great intimacy with very many persons whose lives were above reproach, is proved by the instances of Joanna, Mary and Martha, Salome, and numerous others.

Thirdly, it is declared to be merely a gratuitous assumption that Mary Magdalene was identical with the repentant sinner in the house of Simon. And certainly the Bible does not give a direct idea of this identity. Indeed, I believe that the identity cannot be supported by direct statements, but rests entirely on assumption.

A Protestant writer, C. F. Deems, says: "He (Jesus) was the incarnation of goodness, and had no fierce words of denunciation for fallen women, whom he raised, as well as forgave; but his whole record is so spotless that it shocks us to think that such a being could have found his best beloved friend in a former prostitute, and that she who had been so morally degraded could have had, more than any other woman, the fineness of soul to have been able to appreciate Jesus and to attach herself to such a man with such adherent love. She was a beautiful character. She had been a great sufferer. Jesus had healed her. She was all the finer for what she had endured. She was the watchful attendant of his footsteps. Hers were probably the last human eyes into which the dying eyes of Jesus looked, and hers the first human eyes he is represented to have shown himself unto when he came back from the grave. This is all that is told. It is most exquisite. The utmost delicacy is here. It is the sweetness, not the words of the narrative, which betrays the holy love. And after that last interview, in which Jesus showed her how her mortal affection must be lifted into religious worship, there is nothing more said of Mary. And then history takes this beautifullest love of all the world and mars it, and blotches her name, and associates her with all the fallen of her sex. It is to us one of the most awful problems of human biography. Hers was a bitterly beautiful lot.

She had suffered. She had recovered. She loved her healer She was met, more than any other woman, by the confidence and affection of the most exceptional of all marvellously fine characters. He died looking at her. He rose and showed himself first to her. If she lived to be a century old she had such a memory as never has been vouchsafed to any other woman. In her real life she was lifted to a heaven of love; in history she has been cast down to a hell of infamy. Let her be restored. The truth does restore her. *The Friend of Jesus was a blessed saint.*"

In the light of these explanations, the reader may choose between the two opinions. Whichever is the true one, we must regard Mary as one of the most loving, lovable, and devoted characters in all history. So far as our estimate of her is concerned, it makes but little difference whether she was a repentant sinner or a woman of pure, exalted life. Whichever she illustrates, purity or repentance, the lesson of her life is equally beautiful and important. For while it is far better that men or women never sin, it is well that, having sinned, they repent sincerely. Therefore, in either case, Mary Magdalene is worthy of all praise and honor, and of the vast love which Jesus bestowed upon her.

VI. MARY AND MARTHA.

The two sisters of Lazarus, who lived with him at the little village of Bethany, just over the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem, are of great interest to us, because of the close friendship of Jesus for them. They were apparently independently wealthy, and lived in ease and spiritual contemplation.

This household is first mentioned in connection with Christ's visit there, probably on the occasion of his attendance at the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem, a few months before his death. There seems no doubt, however, that he had known the family for some time before this visit. On this occasion the different dispositions of the two women are clearly shown. Martha proceeded at once to wait on Jesus and the other guests, busying herself with serving, and with directing the labor of the servants. Bustling about, her mind occupied with her multifarious household cares, she gave only casual attention to the group assembled in the spacious banquet hall.

There sat Jesus, delivering an inspiring, enthralling discourse, while about him were grouped

his listening, wondering disciples, and the other visiting Jews. In the midst of the group, charmed and thrilled even more than the others, sat Mary. Her whole soul was in her eyes, as they were riveted upon the face of Jesus, and all her heart was in his discourse.

Anxious to serve him, yet envious of the communion her sister was enjoying, Martha entered the room again and again, only to return to her active service of love. At length she must give vent to her feelings. Coming to Jesus, she tearfully said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."

For a man of less tact and wisdom than Jesus had, it would have been a very difficult situation. But as was usual with him, he turned it into an occasion for teaching an important spiritual lesson. He knew how necessary was the work which Martha was doing, as all work pertaining to our physical life is important. Therefore, he did not desire to rebuke Martha, but simply to impress upon her mind the fact that the physical life is not alone or chiefly important. This lesson he felt that Martha especially needed to learn. Therefore he gently remarked, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

The spiritual life and activity which was so strong in Mary was the "one thing needful" to

Martha, in order to complete her nature. That characteristic once acquired and cultivated, it could not be taken from her, for it would pertain not only to time, but also to eternity. Let Martha acquire this spirituality, at the same time remaining sufficiently careful of the comfort of her guests, and there would be but little lacking to the perfection of her character.

The lesson is an important one to all who are so fully engrossed in their temporal affairs as not to be able to devote themselves to spiritual development. Therefore, the remark was adapted to Martha. Whether or not he considered it appropriate to impress upon Mary the necessity of sharing her sister's household duties, we do not know. Perhaps that part of the lesson was not taught at this time.

The same difference of disposition was manifested by the two sisters on the occasion of Christ's raising their brother Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus arrived at Bethany after the death of Lazarus, Martha impulsively ran out to meet him, half rebuking him for not coming sooner. Mary, on the contrary, sat in the house, calm in spite of her sorrow, and full of faith. Nor did she leave the house until Martha had met Jesus, and returned to her with the suggestion that he desired to see her. Then she rose quickly and went to him; and together all the company proceeded to the sepulchre, where the notable miracle was performed.

In this incident the impulsive activity of Martha and the quiet pensiveness of Mary are again illustrated. Yet neither of the women is unfavorably revealed to us. Each in her way was a sincere friend and worshiper of Jesus. It is to the discredit of neither that one manifested her devotion by actively ministering to him, and the other by listening with adoration to his words. One manifested the worship of earnest, loving labor, the other the worship of pensive, listening meditation.

There is need in the world of Marys and of Marthas. Both types are noble, and each has its place. But the final lesson which appears to me in the incidents so far related of the two women, is that it is well for seasons of active service and of meditative devotion to be common to every nature. She who is lacking in either of these capabilities, should cultivate the "one thing needful" to her nature.

The last mention made of these two sisters is in connection with a most touching and instructive incident which occurred at Bethany a few days before the crucifixion. Jesus and some others were enjoying the hospitality of Simon, a leper whom doubtless Jesus had cured of his infirmity. As they ate, Mary came in with a box of ointment, with costly perfume, and poured it on Jesus' head, while the odor of the ointment filled the room. Some of those present, and particularly Judas Iscariot, objected to the waste of the costly oint-

ment, excusing their objections with the plea that it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. The answer of Jesus was a double approval of her act. "The poor ye have always with you, but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial." Then he added the prophetic words, the fulfilment of which has been constantly recurring through the centuries: "Verily I say unto you, wherever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

This was the last act of kindness, publicly mentioned, which the loving Mary had the privilege of doing for Jesus, and it was then, and has since been more prominently and reverently mentioned than many more pretentious and costly favors. Its very simplicity and loving purpose have kept it in memory after merely perfunctory services done for him have passed out of mind. And since Mary was not permitted, with Magdalene and the other women, to carry spices to the deserted tomb, and there witness the first evidences of the resurrection, it was fitting that she should perform upon his body, before the great change had been wrought, the official anointing for the burial.

Some Bible commentators have expressed the opinion that Mary of Bethany was "the woman who was a sinner," who anointed Jesus, washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the

hair of her head, on the occasion of his eating with one Simon, a Pharisee, as related in Luke 7: 36-50. Without entering into the details of the controversy which has prevailed on this subject, I would merely say that it seems more reasonable that the incidents are not identical, and that this sinful woman was not Mary of Bethany.



VII. WOMEN OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

I. MARY.

Comparatively few women of this important period are mentioned in the Bible, and of these the accounts are brief. The reason for this is the fact that the Apostolic Age was essentially a missionary epoch, and the record is largely taken up with the travels and labors of the Apostles and others in and out of Palestine. The women they met and converted, or benefited in other ways in these missionary journeys, did not enter very largely into the active labor of these traveling ministers, and therefore are not prominently mentioned in the history. Some women are named, however, and a few details of their lives are given. This meager information concerning them has been added to in some cases by later tradition; and thus the little we know of them becomes important and interesting.

One of the most prominent of the women of this period, was Mary, sister of Barnabas, and mother of John Mark. These two men were

among the most zealous workers in spreading the Gospel among the various nations, and Mary seems to have fully shared their zeal. Tradition states that the "upper room" in which the Sacrament of the Lord's supper was instituted, was in her house in Jerusalem; that here the disciples assembled in prayer after the ascension of Christ; that here also the important labor of appointing Matthias an Apostle to succeed Judas, was performed, and that here the Holy Ghost was given on the Day of Pentecost. Whether all these events occurred here or not, we are safe in supposing that Mary's house was a favorite gathering-place for the early Christians, and, on account of the wealth of its owner, a place of great hospitality to the struggling community. Peter seems particularly to have enjoyed this hospitality; and he was apparently on terms of close intimacy with the family. It appears from the allusions occurring in the Acts and the Epistles, that he converted Mark, and trained him for his later missionary labor; and if this "John whose surname was Mark" was identical with the Mark who wrote the second Gospel, Peter's training of and influence over him must have been thorough and lasting. For it is well known that Mark is called the "interpreter" of Peter, and that the gospel of Mark is written very largely from the standpoint of that apostle. This idea is still further sustained by the fact that Peter speaks of the young man as "Marcus, my son."

Of one important event which took place at the house of Mary, we are not left in doubt. Herod had put to death the Apostle James, Peter's close associate, and finding that persecuting the Christians pleased the Jews, he had Peter put in prison, fully intending to have him condemned and doubtless executed after Easter. But in response to the prayers offered by the Saints who were assembled at the house of Mary, an angel came to the prison, where Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, loosed him from his chains, and conducted him past the guards and through the outer gate. Taking his way to the house of Mary, Peter knocked at the door, and was answered by a girl who, recognizing his voice, was so overjoyed that she forgot to open the gate, but ran and told the others who it was. Strange to say, they doubted her word, although this was the very thing they had been praying for. All doubts were soon dispelled, however, and Peter was admitted amid great rejoicing to partake again of the loving hospitality of Mary.

Though she is not mentioned after this incident, we have no doubt that Mary impressed her sublime faith and courage upon her son. For although John Mark manifested what some have construed into fear and vacillation on the occasion of his first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, yet he showed a sublime courage at a later time, in sharing Paul's imprisonment, and then, after Paul's martyrdom, returning to Phoenicia,

and devoting the remainder of his life to the care of the churches there. It is believed that he suffered a martyr's death.

But Mary is not dependent for our veneration and esteem upon the labors and greatness of brother or son. Her own hospitality and kindness, together with her zeal in the work, form our warrant for esteeming her as one of the most active instruments in the founding and nurture of the Apostolic Church.

2. DORCAS.

The house of Tabitha, "gazelle," or, in the Greek, Dorcas, was at Joppa, now Jaffa, an important seaport on the Mediterranean. This city enjoyed a very extensive commerce at that time, in spite of the attempt made to divert the trade to the Roman city Caesarea, not far to the northward. In Joppa, in the midst of the wealth and luxury produced by this commerce, there was great poverty and want. As this is usually associated with disease, especially in the crowded, unsanitary cities of the east, there is no doubt that among these poverty-stricken ones there were many cases of leprosy, paralysis, and other loathsome ailments of that country.

Dorcas was, we presume, a woman of considerable wealth, and she used her means and her time most generously for the benefit of her stricken

neighbors. One form of activity mentioned in connection with her, was the making of coats and garments for the poor—that form of charity which is most acceptable and pleasing, because it involves not only the giving of money, which is cold and unresponsive, but also the giving of effort, which is always warm and sympathetic.

In the midst of these arduous, unceasing labors, Dorcas sickened; and as she was undoubtedly past middle age, and worn with her self-sacrificing toil, she was unable to resist the onslaughts of the disease. Her death was the cause of deep and universal mourning; for all the widows and the orphans whom she had befriended, gathered at her house and joined in lamentation for her.

At Lydda, nine miles from Joppa, Peter was engaged in missionary labor when Dorcas died. The work was spreading into various parts of Palestine at this time, partly as the result of the zealous labors of the apostles, and partly on account of persecution. The death by stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, had occurred just a short time previously, and its effect, apparently, had been to assist the spread of the Gospel into these regions. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Hearing of Peter's presence at Lydda, the mourners sent for him to come to Joppa. In this request there seems to have been a vague faith that through his Apostolic authority and power, a miracle might be wrought. Peter came immed-

ately and found the recipients of Dorcas' bounty assembled in the upper chamber, where the body was prepared for burial. They were weeping and wailing, and showing the garments which their benefactress had made and bestowed upon them.

Touched by their profound grief, yet knowing that this grief would stand in the way of their faith and his, Peter bade them all go out and leave him alone with the dead body. Having knelt down and prayed, Peter turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, arise." She opened her eyes and arose; and he took her by the hand and presented her alive to her friends.

The effects of this striking miracle were very important. Many of the people living in Joppa and in the immediate vicinity, hearing of so notable an event, believed in the divinity of the work of the Apostles, and became converts to Christianity. But an indirect result of Peter's coming to Joppa should be named. It was in Joppa that he was staying, just after this event, when he received the vision on the housetop, teaching him that the Gospel was for the Gentiles, as well as for the Jews; and here, also, he received the messengers from Cornelius, and went soon afterward to Caesarea, where he converted Cornelius and all his house. Therefore, it may be said in a double sense that Dorcas labored for the spread of truth; for in her life she was an exponent of the Gospel, and in her death she opened the way not only for the conversion of many Jews, but also for the great work of carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles.

3. LYDIA.

While Paul and his companions were performing their great missionary work in the western part of Asia Minor, a vision was given to him in which they were commanded to go into Europe and there spread the word. In response to this call, they at once took ship and crossed the narrow strait into Macedonia, going first to the important city of Philippi. This place owed its importance to the fact that in it the civilization of the east and the west met and mingled; the rich dyes and fabrics of Asia finding an open market, and a ready sale to the sturdy and thrifty Europeans.

The city contained a mixed population; and predominating there were the merchants, whose only ideas were expressed in the words "barter and profit." Among these were many Jews, and closely associated with them their proselytes, Greeks who had been converted to Judaism. These were very numerous in the Greek cities of Asia Minor and southern Europe, and it is a remarkable fact that from this class a great number of converts to Christianity were made. It would appear that their conversion to the Jewish faith was a step toward their conversion to Christianity.

While Paul and his associates were in Philippi on a Jewish Sabbath, they saw a group of these proselytes just outside the city engaging in

prayer. Eager to embrace every opportunity of preaching the word, Paul went to them and bore testimony of Jesus. Among them was a devout woman, Lydia, a native of Thyatira, a city in Asia Minor. From this city a sort of purple dye, very much prized at that time, was extensively exported; and it is supposed that Lydia had learned the art of manufacturing or properly using and disposing of this dye, while she lived in her native city. From thence she went to Philippi, perhaps for the purpose of engaging more extensively in this traffic, and it is presumed that she had amassed considerable wealth. But she was most devout and thoroughly earnest in her worship according to her Jewish faith. Lydia, worshipping among the others, heard, with them, the word, but so far as we know she was the only one whose heart was opened to the truth. It was the providence of the Lord that the Apostle should find a devout, hospitable soul, ready not only to receive the word, but to take the messengers into the house with bounteous hospitality. "One of a city" was found here, as one of a city has been found many times by the messengers of God, according to the prophecy of Christ. But none that has been found in any city has proved more faithful or more free with her substance than Lydia.

As soon as she was converted she said, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there." Accepting her invitation, the missionaries made her house their

home, and the centre of their labors. We do not know the extent of the missionary work performed by these men while partaking of the hospitality of Lydia; but from the bitter opposition they met, and from the further fact that the Philippian church was considered important enough to receive a special letter from Paul at a later date, we judge that a large number of conversions crowned their efforts.

It was in Philippi that Paul and Silas were cast into prison; and here the miraculous conversion of the jailer occurred. After their release, they called again at Lydia's house, and met the converts and comforted them, before departing from the city.

Only one more visit of Paul to Philippi is mentioned, and that in connection with his last return to Jerusalem, previous to being sent to imprisonment and death at Rome. Of Lydia we know nothing further, except that she is credited by tradition with laying down her life for the truth—a fitting end to a labor so well begun.

4. PRISCILLA AND PHOEBE.

About the time of the commencement of Paul's missionary labors abroad, Claudius, emperor of Rome, issued an edict requiring all Jews to leave the city and go to scattered provinces of the east and west. This edict included not only those who

were Jews by birth, but their proselytes as well. Among those who were affected by this unjust order was a devout pair of Jewish proselytes, Aquila and Prisca, or Priscilla. We judge from what little is known of them that while they lived at Rome they were possessed of considerable wealth, all of which they were forced to give up when the order of banishment was made against them. Fortunately, Aquila had learned the trade of tent-making; and when he and his wife fled from Rome and took up their residence in Corinth, he was able to earn a livelihood by this occupation.

At that time Corinth, which had been one of the most magnificent cities of ancient Greece, was in a state of physical, religious and moral decay; for Rome had stripped the city of its splendor and wealth, while immorality and idolatry were sapping the foundations of the people's spiritual life. But in the midst of this decadence Aquila and Priscilla kept themselves from moral and religious contamination, remaining true to their Jewish worship and rules of life.

Paul had left Philippi, and had performed his ministrations in a few of the Greek cities, among them Athens, when his labors took him to Corinth. Here he seized the opportunity of bearing his testimony to the work of his Master, and his words were heard by Aquila and Priscilla. It happened that Paul was also a tent-maker, and he therefore found it convenient to make his home with this worthy couple, laboring with Aquila for his own

support. He remained here a year and a half, and during that time his hosts became not only zealous but well-informed converts to Christianity.

As usual, Paul suffered considerable persecution in Corinth; but we have every reason to suppose that through it all he enjoyed the fullest possible friendship and protection at the hands of his converts. During the period of his stay there, however, he made it a careful rule to speak in the synagogue every Sabbath, proclaiming Christ and him crucified. But for private assemblies, and sacrament and prayer meetings, the house of Priscilla was invariably used; and there is no doubt that a high degree of spiritual development was attained in these gatherings.

Either in Corinth or in Cenchrea, Paul converted another woman whose name is held in loving veneration by the Christians. This was Phoebe, an unmarried woman, who thereafter gave her time and substance to the service of the church.

When Paul left Corinth and went to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla went with him; and although the Apostle remained in that city only a short time, these two made their home there. Here they were brought into activity of another kind, in which Priscilla seems to have been the leader; they were called to be teachers of the Gospel. The occasion was the arrival in Ephesus of a young Jew named Apollos, who had recently been converted, but was not very thoroughly instructed in

the Gospel. He was taken to the hospitable home of these devout Christians, and there they taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly. Thus he was prepared for the great missionary labor he afterward performed, which has rendered him famous in Apostolic history.

Very little is known of the subsequent history of Priscilla and Phoebe. Both are mentioned by Paul in some of his later epistles, and he pays a tribute of praise to them which any person might well envy. Of the first he says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks." And of Phoebe, "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that ye receive her in the Lord; * * * for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also."

Phoebe was to the church at Cenchrea what Priscilla was to the branches at Corinth and Ephesus, and both deserve credit for doing eminent service in aiding in the advancement of the work which the Apostles were performing.

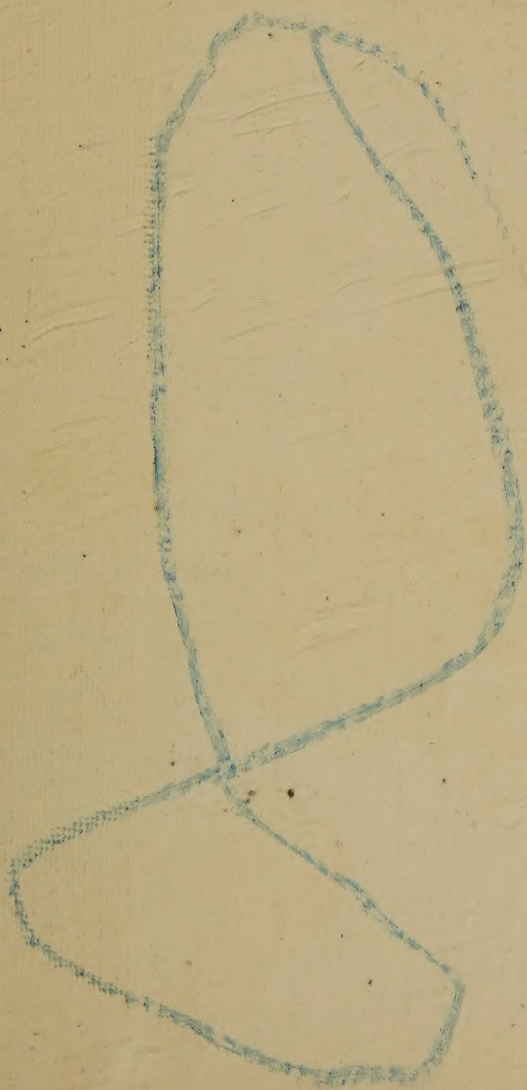
5. THE DAUGHTERS OF PHILIP.

The last journey of Paul to Jerusalem, previous to his going to Rome for final trial, is marked by a small incident which is only mentioned, no comment being made. He had landed at Tyre,

and was making the journey southward, coming at length to Caesarea. Here he and his companions were entertained in the house of Philip, one of the seven discreet men chosen by the Apostles years before to take charge of the ministrations to the poor. The journey had been a sad one to Paul, for it was manifested to him that bonds and imprisonment awaited him.

But not only was the hospitality of the noble Philip a source of satisfaction to him, there were his four daughters, whose faithfulness and spiritual-mindedness were a source of the greatest consolation. These maidens fully partook of the zeal which all the early Christians manifested; and on the occasion of Paul's visit, they showed prophetic power. To the weary, saddened servant of God, this supernatural manifestation must have been most gratifying; for it not only proved an additional and comforting testimony of the work to which he had devoted himself, but it showed, also, the universal nature of that work - the fact that its spirit and its privileges could be enjoyed by all its votaries. This is the fitting conclusion of the record of the women of the Bible. We do not know, and it is of little interest to us, what was the substance of their prophesying; - the fact remains that women, equally with men, may enjoy to the full the privileges of the work of God. It remained for Judaism and Christianity, as recorded in the Bible, to give this recognition to woman.







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